An International Firebrand:
Germano Celant's Role as Radical Critic, Innovative Curator and Contemporary Art Historian

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Abstract

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Within the field of contemporary Western art history, the careers and influence of professional art critics have attracted serious scholarly attention. The work of critics whose activities encompass an international range of artists and exhibitions, however, has rarely been examined. This dissertation provides for the first time an overview of one such person in the career of Italian art critic, historian and curator Germano Celant (1940-), now recognized as one of the most influential interpreters of the late twentieth-century avant-garde and someone whose work aided in transforming the narrative of contemporary art history. This study provides a detailed discussion of Celant's biography, the range of his contributions to the contemporary art world, and a historiography of his writings on "Arte Povera", a term Celant coined to characterize the most influential group of contemporary Italian avant-garde artists. Among Celant's initial goals in identifying this group of Italian artists was to distinguish the unique

artistic research occurring in Italy from the work of American Minimalist artists who were seen by many U.S. and European critics as leaders of the avant-garde in the 1960s. In his writings and curation of exhibitions, Celant not only foregrounded the achievements of Italian and European contemporary artists, but also sought to illustrate congruencies among artists working on both sides of the Atlantic.

This dissertation analyzes Celant's efforts over the last fifty years to encourage a strong international dialogue among artists, curators, art critics and other important figures guiding major institutions. Celant has accomplished this objective in large part through his role as the Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York from 1989 to 2008 and currently as the Artistic Director at the Prada Foundation in Milan. Celant has furthered the careers of many influential artists who might otherwise have been overlooked because their work engages issues such as gender and identity, feminism, institutional critiques, and consumerism, and who moreover did not achieve commercial success. He has also helped to revolutionize the manner in which many contemporary exhibitions are created by rethinking the important dynamic relationship that occurs between the art object and the environment in which it is shown. Recently he has become a leader in the theory and practice of re-staging influential twentieth-century exhibitions. Because of his revolutionary approach in both his art historical writings and his curatorial practices, Celant is both controversial and broadly influential. This dissertation will review these controversies as well as his acknowledged successes in order to elucidate Celant's range of contributions to the fields of art history, criticism and curation.

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DEDICATION

To my advisors, Professors Patricia Failing and Estelle Lingo, whose mentorship has made a lifelong impression.

INTRODUCTION

The late 1960s were an intense, dynamic and transformative period in which social, political, economic, and cultural structures were questioned and overturned by a revolutionary counterculture that spanned the globe. It was during this time in Italy that a young Germano Celant, attracted to contemporary art practices and influenced by the progressive ideas expressed by thinkers such as John Dewey, Carla Lonzi and Umberto Eco, decided to become an art critic. It was also a moment in history when the role of the art critic was being reconsidered within the art world. Artists, overturning traditional art practices, questioning modernist conventions and deconstructing the language of the visual arts, became the mouthpieces for and the promoters of their own work. The art critic no longer held the authoritative position occupied by his or her peers of the previous decade. What was needed at this time were new models of criticism – a critic who was not only an interlocutor between the artists and the larger world, for example, but also someone who could work collaboratively with the artists and who valued their artistic intentions. Celant was such a person, identifying himself as a fellow traveler in the artists' explorations.[1]

In 1967, at the age of 27, Celant launched his career as an art critic with his creation of the term "Arte Povera." He used this term to refer to a group of Italian avant-garde artists who often exhibited together between 1967 and 1971. They worked in different styles, with diverse materials and with varying concepts. Though the roster of artists included within Arte Povera shifted with each exhibition during these initial years, by the early 1980s Celant established a

[1] Germano Celant and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte povera: art from Italy 1967-2002* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 27.

definitive group of thirteen artists.[2] The impetus behind Celant's creation of "Arte Povera" was due in part to the need he perceived for the identification of Italian avant-garde artistic practices that offered an alternative to the then-dominant U.S. art movements of Minimalism and Pop Art. Celant sought to promote artists who created work that offered engaging and thought-provoking experiences not mediated by the consumer market. Yet once the Arte Povera group was accepted by the art world, Celant grew concerned that they were failing to directly confront consumerism and that they were functioning as part of the larger art establishment. This concern led him to declare in 1971 that the grouping of artists under the heading "Arte Povera" was no longer relevant. However, ten years later, Celant decided to reestablish "Arte Povera" as a group through a series of international exhibitions held in the early 1980s. At this point he believed a reconsideration of their artistic methods was necessary, in part because of his concern that current international art practices no longer supported critical art that reflected upon social and cultural issues.

Although Celant is still best known today for his connection to Arte Povera, his decision in 1971 to turn his attention toward other new artistic languages and to focus more specifically on the careers of individual artists was a pivotal moment in the trajectory of his professional development. At this point he turned from identifying with the role of the art critic to considering himself an art historian.[3] His relationship to artists associated with Arte Povera continued, but he also began to examine a broader range of contemporary artistic practices utilized by artists working primarily in Western Europe and the United States who were engaging in diverse and radical new mediums. No longer just writing texts for gallery show catalogues, Celant now

[2] Celant's final list of Arte Povera artists includes Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, and Gilberto Zorio. Most other Arte Povera scholars also consider these twelve artists the key figures of the movement. Occasionally Piero Gilardi is also included.
[3] Celant, *Arte povera: art from Italy 1967-2002*, 27.

focused his scholarly endeavors on monographs devoted to individual artist and essays for museum exhibition catalogues. Between 1971 and 2014 Celant published more than one hundred books, articles and essays, many of which coincide with the hundreds of large-scale exhibitions he curated worldwide. In addition to these manuscripts, Celant has published widely in numerous art journals and has served as a contributing editor to *Artforum* since 1977, *Interview* since 1991 and *L'Espresso* since 1999.

Celant's unique approach to and understanding of contemporary art and his adherence to his own inner vision, I will argue, has positioned him as a leading voice of contemporary artistic practice. The objective of this dissertation is to ascertain what makes Celant's work as an art critic, historian and curator distinctive, to review the development of his critical practice over the years, and to analyze the major sources that influenced him. Celant's particular attitude toward artists' works in both his writings and his manner of curating exhibitions is in large part derived from his cultural background: his experience as a student of the renowned Renaissance and Baroque art historian, Eugenio Battisti; his relationships to leaders of the Italian Feminist Movement *Rivolta Femminile*; his acquaintance with Umberto Eco; and the countless friendships that he forged with emerging avant-garde artists. Yet in the end this dissertation is not only a critical analysis of the career of an important art-world figure. A study of Celant also entails an acknowledgment of major shifts in the international contemporary art community and an investigation of some of the important initiatives instigated by many artists over the last half century. In order to analyze the role Celant has played in larger events of the art world, this dissertation will move chronologically through Celant's career from his first forays into art criticism and his emergence onto the international art scene to his major curatorial projects as the Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York from

1989 to 2008, and finally in his recent endeavors as the Artistic Director of the Prada Foundation. A historiography of Celant's writings on "Arte Povera" will clarify the relevance of this disputed term as well as establish the foundations for Celant's later poetic style of writing. Furthermore, an examination of Celant's writings, together with the writings of other key scholars examined alongside a visual analysis of corresponding art works, will elucidate the complex matrix from which Celant's rhetorical style emerged.[4] In regard to Celant's curatorial career, this dissertation will investigate how institutions of art have responded to, and at times neglected, developments in contemporary art and the crucial role Celant played in recognizing and working with new forms of artistic practice. As a contemporary art curator Celant has dealt with the rapidly shifting terrain of the contemporary artistic practice that is strongly guided by the fiscal pursuits of dealers and auction houses and the outdated facilities of exhibition spaces.

To date, no full account of the life and career of Germano Celant exists. Comprehensive studies of art historians, critics, curators and collectors have been uncommon when compared to the attention given to artists within the field of art history. This area of study has begun to develop in the last few decades, coinciding with contemporary avant-garde artists' attempts to deconstruct the art establishment. These efforts have encouraged a new scrutiny of the scholars, curators and financial linchpins who helped to create the framework for the institutional systems. In the case of Celant, only a handful of interviews with various figures from the art world published over the last few decades offers first-hand accounts of his thinking and biography. For

[4] Celant has received criticism for his writing style by some U.S. scholars. The abstract, poetic quality of his writing, in particular his early writings of the late 1960s, can be explained in part by the difficulty of translating the subtleties of the Latin-based Italian language, which is written in a higher register than spoken Italian, into the Germanic-based English language. Furthermore, the intellectual climate within Europe and Italy during the 1960s found scholars and writers such as Celant engaging in an abstract discourse that experimented with the written language, decentered linguistic stability and often sought to express the author's stream of consciousness. Celant's style also reflects the tendency within written Italian for the author to subtly arrive at his or her point through nuance and metaphor, very unlike the more direct English language.

the most part these interviews center on Celant's relationship to Arte Povera and focus only on his early career during the late 1960s. When characterizing Celant's profession or historiography, scholars and critics inevitably align him with this group of artists, which often casts his own diverse scholarship in a skewed light and fails to account for his larger, productive career. Nevertheless, because of Celant's continued relationship to Arte Povera artists and his creation of the term, it is inevitable, and relevant, for emerging Arte Povera scholars to investigate and critique Celant's involvement with these artists as a preface for their own new insights. My study will examine not only Celant's connection to Arte Povera, but also will analyze his engagement with many other artists he has worked with throughout the last forty years in order to chart the accomplishments of this influential figure.

A close reading of Celant's numerous exhibition catalogue essays, monographs, articles, and artists' interviews offers both insight into the subject of these texts and insight into the agendas and personal beliefs of the writer. Unlike many other art scholars during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in America, who attempted to maintain an objective and detached voice when chronicling the events of the art world, Celant never denies his own presence within his writings. This acknowledgement has enabled him to engage in open and direct dialogues with artists and to develop distinctive – even perverse – interpretations of their work. For Celant, comprehending and acknowledging the entire context, including his relationship to the artist, is essential when addressing the work of artists he surveys.

In this dissertation, key texts associated with central events within Celant's career and representative of his evolving interests and shifting rhetoric will be utilized to demonstrate the writer's breadth and development as an art critic and historian. Among these selected works is Celant's collection of essays published in 2011, *Arte Povera: History and Stories,* which

contains the numerous Arte Povera essays written for exhibitions held between 1967 and 2011. A pivotal moment in Celant's career occurred when he curated the exhibition "Ambiente/arte dal futurismo alla body art" for the 1976 Venice Biennale; the coinciding text offers his account of this revolutionary show featuring artistic environments. Another example is Celant's first curatorial project at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1989 for the Italian artist Mario Merz. Celant's essay for the show's catalogue, "The organic flow of art," contextualizes the artist's oeuvre within a detailed autobiography and is demonstrative of Celant's primary method of analysis within his writings. Celant's essay "Mapplethorpe as Neoclassicist" on the American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe for a joint exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, exemplifies Celant's passion for provocative art forms and his desire to convey within his writings the visceral, sensual and complex experience art can offer viewers. A study of these and other representative texts demonstrates Celant's appreciation of challenging avant-garde works and offers readers insightful readings of these artistic practices.

Other significant art-world voices woven into my analysis are those of American contemporary art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who was director of the Museo di Arte Contemporanea di Torino until 2009; the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, best known for his support in the 1980s of the Italian art movement, the Transavantgarde; the German art historian of contemporary art Benjamin Buchloh; the American art critic Donald Kuspit, an advocate for the return to traditional painting techniques in the 1980s; and the American contemporary art historians Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens, who offered critical counter-views to Kuspit's position. These scholars and critics have deepened awareness and understanding of several precedents in contemporary artistic research. An investigation of their interpretations

alongside Celant's critical readings will help to illustrate Celant's distinctive contribution and voice.

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters that chronicle the life and career of Germano Celant within the framework of a rapidly developing contemporary art world. Chapter One, "Becoming a Guerrilla Warrior, 1961-1967," examines Celant's early education at the University of Genoa and the beginning of his career as an art critic. This chapter will discuss Celant's education under Eugenio Battisti and his relationship to the art critic Carla Lonzi, a founder of the Feminist movement *Rivolta Femminile* who helped change the role of the art critic and who influenced Celant's form of art criticism. Also discussed are figures representing the contemporary global gallery scene such as Ileana Sonnabend, Luciano Pistoi and Gian Enzo Sperone all of whom helped to introduce the Italian audience to the latest in American artistic research. This chapter also situates Celant's development within the context of major shifts occurring within the contemporary art world, particularly in Italy, in order to support the discussion of new challenges Celant faced in his critical practice.

Chapter Two, "Defining Arte Povera," offers for the first time a detailed historiography of Celant's writings on Arte Povera and analyzes his approach to the term within the context of writings by other well-established Arte Povera scholars. An investigation of the changing definitions of "Arte Povera" Celant developed between 1967 and 1971 offers a nuanced understanding of Celant's endeavors with this group of artists as well as establishes the groundwork for understanding the evolution of his rhetorical style over the last half century. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, most art historians and art critics involved in an examination of artists associated with "Arte Povera" have questioned the term's relevancy and critiqued Celant's agenda in his promotion of these artists. Because of Celant's pivotal role in the

worldwide understanding of Arte Povera and his refusal to offer a clear and definitive definition of the group, many scholars have taken issue with Celant's writings and faulted him for either dominating the understanding of these artists' careers or for misconstruing the artists' aims. More recently, in the past decade, a handful of emerging scholars has taken on the task of re-assessing the artistic events surrounding this term, while avoiding any direct investigation of the role Celant played. This approach situates Celant's contributions as a somewhat settled, albeit unresolved, issue.

This second chapter addresses several contentions related to Celant's role during the early years of "Arte Povera" and the questioned relevancy of the term. With each successive exhibition and essay written about Arte Povera from 1967 to the present, Celant adapted and altered the definition of the group in order to accommodate their diverse and growing artistic practices as well as to resist the commercial appropriation of their work. An understanding of the evolution of the term "Arte Povera" will be developed through an examination of Celant's shifting definitions of Arte Povera over roughly a twenty-year period beginning in 1967, as well as a look at various responses to Celant's writings by various international art critics over the last forty years. To address critiques of "Arte Povera" and acknowledge the achievements of an important art scholar, this dissertation reexamines the cultural context for the development of the term "Arte Povera" and for the first time provides an in-depth analysis of Celant's art critical thinking which occurs throughout his later writings.

Chapter Three, "Arte Povera's Reemergence during the 1980s Return to Painting," continues the discussion begun in Chapter Two concerning Celant's intentions in reinstating the term "Arte Povera" in the early 1980s. The objective of this chapter is to address the lack of scholarship concerning Celant's decision to reunite Arte Povera artists in the early 1980s after he

had disavowed the concept of "Arte Povera" in 1971 and to discuss the importance of this second phase of Arte Povera within the context of other art-world developments. This pivotal moment will be assessed through an examination of two different camps of artistic practice occurring at this time in Italy: the critical art of Arte Povera, largely overlooked by the art market at this point, and the art of the Italian Transavantgarde that was commercially supported. The Transavantgarde consisted of five painters and sculptors – Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Sandro Chia, Mimmo Paladino, and Nicola De Maria – all united by the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, who coined the term "Transavantgarde." Their work returned to traditional modes of artistic expression, embracing figuration, symbolism and their intuitive, subjective identity as "heroic" artists. Bonito Oliva, a friend of Celant's, had initially been a supporter of Arte Povera. However, significant economic shifts transformed the economic and institutional landscape of the art world in the 1980s. A polemic developed among artists such as those associated with Arte Povera, whose research attempted to break down long-established artistic constructs, and a new generation of artists such as the Transavantgarde, who embraced a return to traditional techniques and the monetary success that followed. To elucidate these complexities, this chapter will turn to various voices within the art world who championed the opposing sides. In this period of dissonance, Celant's perspective was clear and consistent with his past actions and his underlying concern and support for "critical art" emerged noticeably in his work at this time. In this context "critical art" can be understood as transgressive work that critiques established systems and engages contemporary social concerns. Celant's support for artists who produce "critical art" has been fundamental to his objectives in his writing and exhibitions. Through a juxtaposition of key artists' works, this chapter will attempt to demonstrate the innovative artistic

methods of Arte Povera Celant supported, particularly in regard to their reconceptualization of traditional painting practices, and their unique approach to their cultural heritage.

Chapter Four, "An Independent Curator: Celant's Exhibition Career, 1988-2008," will continue the discussion of "critical art" begun in Chapter Three and will be supported by multiple examples of large-scale museum exhibitions taken from Celant's curatorial career, which is the focus of this chapter. Although Celant is now an independent curator, this chapter examines the more recent phases of Celant's career working within two major art institutions: the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Prada Foundation in Milan. The selected examples illustrate important moments within Celant's curatorial career as well as provide pertinent support to the discussion of current conditions of contemporary exhibition practices and examine ways in which Celant has helped to transform contemporary museum and exhibition structures.

Chapter Five, "Reenactment/Reinvention: Curating Anachronic Exhibitions in the Twenty-First Century," examines two of Celant's most recent curatorial efforts: "Arte Povera 2011," a series of exhibitions held in multiple Italian cities which attracted, once again, praise as well as condemnation, and Celant's 2013 restaging of "When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969 Venice 2013," an exhibition originally curated in 1969 by the art historian and curator Harald Szeemann, and which Celant reconstructed in its entirety in the Prada Foundation's exhibition space at Ca' Corner della Regina in Venice. Utilizing these two ambitious exhibitions as primary examples of the groundbreaking approach Celant brings to curation, this chapter will examine his baroque-inspired attitude toward curating exhibition spaces that allow viewers to become more than contemplative spectators of art objects by creating physically engaging and immersive artistic environments. The discussion of "Arte Povera 2011" will also return to the question

raised in Chapter Two of the continued relevance of "Arte Povera" and Celant's intentions in reviving the group and the term. Regarding the restaging of "When Attitude Becomes Form Bern 1969 Venice 2013," and touching upon similar tendencies within the staging of "Arte Povera 2011," this final chapter will consider the recent curatorial trend of restaging past exhibitions and suggest that the theoretical and procedural advancements made in the field of performance reenactment may provide relevant responses to questions raised by critics of exhibition reenactment.

As these unfolding chapters reveal, this dissertation aims to provide a broad understanding of the career of Germano Celant and his contributions to the world of contemporary art along with offering new insights into the political, social, and economic vicissitudes associated with this world. And while advancing a more nuanced discussion of the importance of Arte Povera, this dissertation's goal is also to acknowledge and analyze the achievements of Celant in recognizing and supporting new forms of artistic militancy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Celant's support of radical artists, such as those associated with Arte Povera, as well as his ability to appreciate the importance of encouraging these and other contemporary artists to fully express their intentions has helped to ensured that artists who transgress the power of established norms, traditions and values continue to play a role in global culture.

CHAPTER ONE

BECOMING A GUERRILLA WARRIOR, 1961-1967

> The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.
>
> -John Dewey[5]

The above words of the American pragmatist John Dewey, who situated the locus of personal identity in an individual's decisions and deeds, would inspire the actions of many revolutionary youths, including Germano Celant.[6] Dewey's concept of a self constituted through action, moving through life in a constant state of flux, provided a model for transformative social practice. In the late 1960s, a period of radical activism swept across nations, driven by individuals who believed that the power of direct and critical social engagement could lead to political and cultural reform. In Italy, student protestors burning with energy and desire to create a new reality unfettered by repressive customs, called for an overturning of traditional values, hierarchies and dogmas. Minority groups, women and workers joined the students in their attempt to undermine established norms.[7] Many young artists felt a similar need to question the

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[5] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillian, 1916), 408. This often-quoted line from Dewey is paraphrased from this sentence: "The moment we recognize that the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action, the whole situation clears up." This quote is found in the second part of Chapter 26 "Theory of Morals," in which Dewey summarizes his arguments concerning the important role an individual's education and personal development plays within society and how this education must be consciously undertaken conceptually and through experience both within the classroom and society. This chapter discusses the development of one's character, psychic and physical. For Dewey, it is necessary for humans to recognize and nurture both their emotional consciousness and actions as they develop their moral position within society through their education and occupation. A person's responsibility to society originates from both personal self-interest and selfless duty and, because individual identity is never fixed, it is in a continual development as it responds to its needs and the expectations of society. Dewey argues, therefore, that it is important to acknowledge that self-identity is tied to one's daily actions and to not privilege consciousness over conduct.

[6] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.

[7] Relevant studies on the late 1960s protests and student revolts in Italy include: Donald Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy: Economy, Society and Politics since 1945* (London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman Publishing, 1997); Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968 The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge

established authority of institutions supporting the mid-century modernist avant-garde. As a young and well-informed art critic just emerging onto the Italian art scene in the mid-1960s, Germano Celant was well positioned to play a key role in the unconventional artistic research occurring within the world of contemporary art. The experiences of his early career would leave a lasting impression upon his later work.

Germano Celant was born in the North Italian city of Genoa in 1940. Italy's largest port town, Genoa was a city with a large working-class population that moreover became the center of one of the nation's largest Communist parties in the mid-twentieth century. Among Celant's early memories of his youth are the violent fights that occurred in the early 1960s and which he witnessed among the Communist workers and neo-Fascist party members.[8] Celant's later interpretations of artists' working practices would be read through his leftist political beliefs developed within this political environment and his experiences of the revolts by the working class in Genoa.

Celant's adolescence coincided with the Italian "economic miracle" that occurred during the 1950s and early 1960s. The years following the Second World War were marked by government democracy, industrialization, and a free market, all of which fostered a new expansive growth and development of the Italian nation that quickly transformed the country. What had previously been a largely agricultural-based economy rapidly became an industrial,

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University Press, 1998); and Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[8] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013. After WWII Italy's political world was led by the party of the Christian Democracy (DC), which was supported by U.S. economic and political aid. Other political parties in play were the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Social Movement, a neo-Fascist political party that originated in southern Italy in 1946 allied with multiple youth organizations such as the Raggruppamento Giovanile Studenti e Lavoratori (Students and Workers' Youth Group) and the Associazione Studentesca di Azione Nazionale Giovane Italia (Student Association of National Action – Young Italy). Harry Hearder, "Italy since the Second World War, 1945-80," in *Italy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Andrea Mammone, "The Transnational Reaction to 1968: Neo-Fascist Fronts and Political Cultures in France and Italy," *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 2 (May, 2008), 213-236.

export-oriented economy participating in the world market. [9] This rebuilding of the Italian economy and infrastructure was aided in part by the United States' Marshall Plan. For many Italians, the improved living conditions and the promise of a better life associated with the model of American capitalism and consumerism were welcome.

While Italy saw developments within the industrial economy, attention to improvements in housing, education and health care systems was lacking.[10] By the mid-1960s students began to respond in protest to the outdated education system with inadequate facilities, materials and teachers to accommodate a massive influx of new students.[11] Additionally, many students began to question the values of consumerism, materialism, and individualism promoted during the "economic miracle." The most active period of student protest occurred internationally from the fall of 1967 to the spring of 1968, with numerous universities being occupied by protestors holding sit-ins and rallies.[12]

As Italy was swept into the fervor of political activism occurring across the globe, radical changes transpired within contemporary art. Many of the artists in Italy during the early 1960s were engaging in innovative artistic research, seeking an artistic expression beyond the dominant trends of painterly, abstract expressionism and *Art Informel* being produced by post-war U.S. and

[9] Useful references for a broad understanding of the development of Italian society in the second half of the twentieth century are: Alberto Martineli, Antonio M. Chiesi, and Sonia Stefanizzi, *Recent Social Trends in Italy 1960-1995* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871-1982* (London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1984); Peter Lange and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Italy in Transition: Conflict and Consensus* (Great Britain: Frank Cass, 1980); Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (New York and London: Verso, 1990); and Harry Hearder, *Italy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[10] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 216.
[11] Ginsborg, 298-299.
[12] Ibid., 300-305.

European artists grappling with their existential condition after the atrocities of the war.[13] Artistic developments being carried out in the U.S. were gradually gaining attention within Europe through the efforts of influential gallery owners such as Ileana Sonnabend and Leo Castelli, who helped to introduce Minimalist and Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, John McCracken, Donald Judd, Frank Stella, and Larry Bell.[14]

From a young age Celant felt drawn to the arts and the work of unique, creative figures, particularly in theater and the writings of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco. At age sixteen Celant mingled with a group of erudite individuals associated with Ezra Pound, who was living at the time in the town of Rapallo near Genoa. Later, while in school, Celant would explore music and literature in more depth as well as begin to socialize in circles of avant-garde artists.[15] Following his parents' inclinations Celant attended the University of Genoa as an engineering student.[16] His interest in the contemporary art scene, however, detracted from his studies in engineering. When Eugenio Battisti, a scholar of sixteenth-century Italian art history joined the university's faculty in 1961, Celant attended his art history classes and became one of his students. Battisti was one of the first important figures to direct Celant on his path to becoming an art historian and critic of contemporary art. Although no contemporary art courses were offered within the university, Battisti encouraged his students to explore the latest artistic works being shown in local galleries. From Battisti, Celant learned to develop a "baroque vision" of contemporary art, which can be traced throughout Celant's writings and curatorial endeavors over the last forty years. Celant's adoption of the concept of the "baroque" to describe his

[13] Giuliano Briganti, "Cultural Provocation: Italian Art of the Early Sixties," in *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1988,* edited by Emily Braun (Munich: Prestel-Verlag and London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1989), 301-302.
[14] Ann Temkin and Claire Lehmann, *Ileana Sonnabend: Ambassador for the New* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013); Leo Castelli Gallery and David Whitney, *Leo Castelli: Ten Years* (New York: Castelli, 1967).
[15] Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera* (Milan: Electra, 1985), 21.
[16] Celant received an honorary degree in Architecture from Genoa University in 2004.

curatorial approach is located in his endeavor to create immersive environments in which viewers conceptually as well as viscerally experience the artistic space. This "baroque vision" also embraces all elements of artistic languages, viewing them as being of equal importance and having the potential to be interrelated in their expression instead of being held apart in distinct fields of artistic practice.[17] This ecumenical conception of artistic practice enabled Celant to develop his art-critical methodology in many directions and to avoid becoming specialized in only one field of artistic research, further enabling him to appreciate the unusual avenues of investigation being conducted by contemporary artists.[18] It was also through Battisti that Celant learned the value of authenticating statements made by artists, scholars and documentary sources and thoroughly analyzing the actual art objects, in contrast to the uninhibited practice in Italian art criticism at the time of providing biased or fabricated information.[19] It was also during his time at the University of Genoa that Celant actively engaged in different avenues of artistic research, founding the University Center for the Visual Arts and organizing and promoting the first Latin American and Pan-African film festivals, which enabled him to establish contacts within the Italian art scene.[20]

According to Celant, little attention was given to contemporary art practices within Italian academia or in national museums and current news media in the early 1960s. Within

[17] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013. Celant has never fully defined his conception of a "baroque vision." In addition to influencing Celant's "baroque" approach, Battisti's work on the Renaissance in in *L'antirinascimento* (1962) reverberates in Celant's later practices. This book addresses a range of topics and materials that were not considered relevant to the narrative of art history at the time. Battisti's attention to "lesser" art forms, his downplaying of the role of individual artists, the attempt to locate and reveal aspects of cultural history that were neglected by previous art historical scholarship, and his complication of commonly held understandings of styles, periods and regional influences are all elements that Celant adopts within his own work. Eugenio Battisti, *L'antirinascimento* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962). For a review of *L'antirinascimento* see: M.W. Cole and C.S. Wood, "Eugenio Battisti, L'antirinascimento," *Art Bulletin- New York* 95 no. 4(December 2013): 651-655.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid. Celant mentioned this point during our conversation as an important issue that he felt was necessary to counter within his own writings.
[20] Ibid.

academia, the narrative of modern art history stopped at Impressionism.[21] Many art scholars within academia were influenced heavily by the work of the twentieth-century philosopher, politician and aesthetician, Benedetto Croce. Croce professed an idealistic approach to understanding artistic creation in that he defined "a work of art" as an intuition formed within the mind of the artist rather than the external product the artist produces. Croce's aesthetic philosophy is captured in his essay "What is Art?" published in his collection of essays, *The Essence of Aesthetics* (1921). In this text Croce argues that art *is* intuition and that intuition expresses the artist's feeling. Croce's identification of "art" with intuition excluded material qualities of artworks such as style and craft as relevant to aesthetics. He summarizes his theoretical argument with his formula:

> …what gives coherence and unity to the intuition is feeling: the intuition is really such because it represents a feeling, and can only appear from and upon that. Not the idea, but the feeling, is what confers upon art the airy lightness of the symbol: an aspiration enclosed in the circle of a representation – that is art.[22]

There remained a small collective of scholars, among them Celant, who rejected this approach to interpreting an artist's work. These art historians and critics perceived the importance of attending to the context in which the work of art was created as well as the influential circumstances the artist's biography played in shaping the object. [23] As an alternative to the dominant Crocean mindset within academia, Celant embraced the contextual approach of the influential art historians Erwin Panofsky and Aby Warburg.[24]

Others who rejected the limited framework of Crocean aesthetics within Italy were the art historians and critics Giulio Carlo Argan, Nello Ponente, Maurizio Calvesi, and Celant's teacher,

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[21] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 19th, 2013; Germano Celant, "A History among Stories," in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan: Electra, 2011), 19.
[22] Benedetto Croce, "The Art?" in *The Essence of Aesthetic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London: William Heinemann, 1921), 30.
[23] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.
[24] Ibid.

Eugenio Battisti. During his extensive career, Battisti published numerous art-historical texts on Italian artists from the thirteenth through the seventeenth century such as Giotto, Cimabue, Brunelleschi, Piero della Francesca, Michelangelo, Giorgione and Diego Velázquez. Though Battisti's publications focused on early modern artists, he was also a proponent of contemporary artists and helped to organize numerous exhibitions of their work. Recognizing the deficiency of support for contemporary artists within Italy who lacked a museum in which to show their work, Battisti founded in 1963 the Museo Sperimentale (Experimental Museum), the first modern art museum in the city. This collection of art works was a tool for teaching students the latest in artistic practices by studying the original objects. This grassroots effort led Celant, who was at this point Battisti's principal assistant, to travel throughout Italy meeting with artists and asking them to contribute work to the new collection. By the end of the 1960s artists had contributed 360 works to the collection,[25] which was later donated to the Civic Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Turin.[26]

It was during this time that Celant developed numerous friendships within the art world. Among his associates were the art historians Guilio Carlo Argan and Maurizio Calvesi and the filmmakers Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardo Bertolucci.[27] Celant would further develop important artistic friendships when he accepted the position of editor at Battisti's magazine, *Marcatré*, also founded in 1963. This interdisciplinary magazine was dedicated to the review of

[25] Robert Lumley, "Germano Celant. The Arte Povera period," *Domus*, October, 31 2010, http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2010/10/31/germano-celant-the-arte-povera-period.html; Artists who contributed work included: Carla Accardi, Enrico Baj, Alighiero Boetti, Luciano Fabro, Lucio Fontana, Paolo Icaro, Jannis Kounellis, Marissa Merz, Mario Merz, Giulio Paolini, Carol Rama, Mimmo Rotella, Mario Schifano, and Emilio Vedovo. A full list can be found in *Museo sperimentale d'arte contemporanea* (Torino: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 1967).
[26] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 19th, 2013.
[27] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 21.

the contemporary art scene, and covered literature, music, architecture and the visual arts.[28] When Battisti began to teach art history courses at Pennsylvania State University in the U.S., he turned over the leadership of the Museo Sperimentale and *Marcatré*, which at this point was located in Milan, to Celant. Working for these two prominent contemporary art projects in cities known for their burgeoning and dynamic art scenes enabled Celant to develop his curatorial and art-critical skills within two significant centers of the contemporary art world.[29]

Celant's position as the editor for *Marcatré* also led him to travel extensively throughout Italy, meeting with artists and art dealers and further developing his contacts and friendships within the art world as he collected the latest news about gallery events in Italy. Celant focused his initial conversations in northern Italy and came to know the artists Getulio Alviani, Paolo Scheggi, Enrico Castellani and Agostino Bonalumi in Milan. In Turin he met Giulio Paolini, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Jannis Kounellis when Kounellis visited the city from Rome. Through his travels to Venice, Celant became acquainted with Umbro Apollonio, the director of the Venice Biennale, who commissioned Celant's first in-depth study, on the artist Ben Nicholson.[30] Celant also came to know personally other contributors to *Marcatré*: the poet Edoardo Sanguineti, the composer Vittorio Gelmetti, the ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella, the semiotician Umberto Eco, the art critic Gillo Dorfles, and the architect Paolo Portoghesi.[31] Another regular contributor to the magazine was the feminist Carla Lonzi who would be influential to Celant's development as an art critic.[32]

[28] Ibid. This was the first interdisciplinary magazine in Italy according to Celant.
[29] Lumley, "Germano Celant. The Arte Povera period," n.p.
[30] Celant, "A History among Stories," *Arte Povera: History and Stories*, 22.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Lumley, "Germano Celant. The Arte Povera period," n.p.

Though perhaps best known for her work as a radical activist for female rights during the 1960s and 1970s, Lonzi began her career as an art critic. Lonzi studied art history at the University of Florence under Roberto Longhi, a scholar of fifteenth-and seventeenth-century Italian art history who was known for re-conceptualizing the narrative of Italian early modern art and bringing to light then-understudied artists such as Piero della Francesca and Caravaggio. Longhi had the ability to see the past with a fresh eye that recognized the avant-garde quality of these early-modern artists.[33] Longhi also contributed to periodicals devoted to the trends in contemporary avant-garde artistic practices and was considered a key Italian critic of the twentieth century for his fresh insights, appealing prose and ability to invent new terms to describe the nuances of a work of art.[34] This range of expression can be seen in the revolutionary approach Lonzi took in her art critical writings.

Prior to the 1960s the standard role of the art critic and historian in Italy was to interpret and communicate the meaning of the artists' works. Lonzi was unique as an art critic because she no longer tried to interpret the works. Instead, she developed a form of art criticism that allowed the artist's voice to take dominance over the art critic's. Through lengthy, open conversations with artists, Lonzi established a form of art criticism that would become fundamental to Celant's own approach. Yet it was not only Lonzi's form of art criticism that would influence the later work of Celant, but also her radical feminist stance. Lonzi was a founding member of the group *Rivolta Femminile* (Female Revolt) with her friend, the Italian artist Carla Accardi.[35] Celant became very familiar with the work of this feminist group not only through his acquaintance with Lonzi, but also through his intimate relationship with another member of the group, Ida

[33] Marco Grassi, "Roberto Longhi remembered," *The New Criterion* (December 2008), 19.
[34] Grassi, "Roberto Longhi remembered," 18-19.
[35] Stefano Chiodi, "A Conversation with Carla Accardi," in *Carla Accardi*, eds. Del Frate Rayburn, Isabella and Gian Enzo Sperone (New York: Sperone Westwater, 2004), 7.

Gianelli, a scholar of contemporary art who would become the Director of the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art. Celant's understanding and appreciation of feminism was further developed through his friendship with the American art critic and feminist Lucy Lippard, whom he came to know during this time through written correspondence and his travels to the United States. [36]

Celant's frequent presence in Milan led him to be in direct contact with the work of Lonzi. Founded in 1970 in Milan, the first act of *Rivolta Femminile* was to publish a manifesto and then to spread its word by posting this manifesto on the streets of Rome.[37] The group also opened a location on via Beato Angelico in Milan in 1975 with the intention of offering a space to unite feminists, develop feminist theories and projects that were also being advanced in the United States and France, and to exhibit works of historical female artists such as Angelica Kauffman and Artemisia Gentileschi.[38] The first manifesto signaled the group's overarching agenda, which was for a reconceptualization of the female identity that was not defined in juxtaposition to masculine identity: "By not recognizing herself in male culture woman deprives it of the illusion of universality. Man has always spoken in the name of humanity but half the world population now accuses him of having sublimated a mutilation. Man's strength lies in identifying with culture, ours in refuting it…."[39] This resistance to cultural paradigms and hierarchies that offered rigid definitions of women coincided with the larger social unrest occurring in the student protests of traditional Italian culture, yet unlike the student protestors who sought to subsume their personal relationships "to the greater goal of eventual radical

[36] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.
[37] Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, eds. *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 36.
[38]Hans Ulrich Obrist, "An A to Z for Carla Accardi, Pars pro toto," in *Carla Accardi* (Rome: MACRO, 2004), 78.
[39] Rivolta Femminile, "Manifesto," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 40.

change," Italian feminists placed emphasis on the personal, private spheres of life and "on non-violence and their insistence on loose and non-authoritarian forms of organization."[40]

Rivolta Femminile was not an organization, therefore, that sought to directly participate in political activism. Instead its intention was to offer an arena in which women could examine their personal identities and to question the construct of their gender within social-cultural tradition.[41] Members of this intellectual group, influenced by their contemporaries in America, sought to develop new feminist theories, in particular to develop personal self-awareness through a process called *autocoscienza*, which was introduced to the Italian feminist scene by Lonzi. The aim of this practice was to discover and (re)construct the identity of the woman, as an individual and within the collective, by entering into a dialogue with a group of women to discuss personal experiences. This mode of inner-directed analysis resisted cultural mediation in order to arrive at a more personal, autonomous and authentic awareness of the self.[42]

Rivolta Femminile disseminated their writings through their own publishing house, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, which enabled the participants to maintain control over their message.[43] Any submission by a member of *Rivolta* was accepted for publication in order to embrace all personal accounts shared by the writers and further raise personal awareness of each individual subject.[44] The importance of placing emphasis on the individual subject before the object is a theme readily traced throughout Celant's own writings in his approach to artists. Just as Celant recognized through his studies with Battisti that the socio-political and cultural contexts of the situation must be considered to fully understand the artist's work, he concluded that the

[40] Ginsborg, 304-305; 368-369.
[41] Eva Rus, "From *New York Radical Feminists* to *Rivolta Femminile*: Italian Feminists Rethink the Practice of Consciousness Raising," *Irish Feminist Review* 1 (2005), 188.
[42] Bono and Kemp, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, 9-11.
[43] Rus, 36.
[44] Ibid., 190.

appreciation of the personal, subjective biography of each artist was necessary as well. For this reason Celant quotes artists as much as possible when writing about their work and incorporates interviews with them into his publications. Celant has also stated that it is just as important to recognize his own voice and sympathy for artists within his writings and interviews and therefore avoid masking his subjective presence within these encounters. [45] When articulating his point of view on a work, he seeks to offer an unusual interpretation that provides readers a new insight or angle to interpret the work of art. Celant adapted this approach both from Battisti and feminist practices. From Battisti Celant learned that fresh insights can be found from reading a work of art from a "perverse" viewpoint.[46] This interpretation can either be accepted or not, for it is not necessary to force readers to side with a single analysis. It was this acknowledgement of his own voice that Celant acknowledges he learned from feminism.[47] Although Celant's emphasis on subjective individuality could be construed as narcissistic in regard to feminist writings, *Rivolta Femminile* "…considers the stress on the individual as a necessary acceptance of responsibility toward the content of the writing itself on the part of the author, as well as a symbol that would mark a woman's way out from the silence."[48]

The silence that surrounded the personal experiences of women during this time was also experienced by artists and Lonzi sought to give them voice in her avant-garde art critical text *Autoritratto* (1969). Lonzi published *Autoritratto* shortly before she decided to entirely abandon her role as an art critic and focus her entire energies on being a leader of the feminist movement

[45] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.
[46] Ibid. In recognizing that a work could be read with a "perverse" approach, Celant affirms that a meaningful understanding of an artwork may arise from a distinctly personal reading on the part of a critic. For example, in our conversation, Celant addressed the work of Robert Mapplethorpe (discussed more fully in Chapter Four) and explained that his essay on the artist's work, in which the theme of Eros is prominent, was inspired by his own passionate relationship with his girlfriend at the time and the long conversations he had one night with Mapplethorpe in his studio.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Rus, 190.

in Italy. *Autoritratto* is a pivotal work for understanding a new model for the role of art critic and artist within the art world. This text gives voice to and reveals a concept of subjectivity composed of many shifting fragments, and not a product of a centralized, rational and clearly organized mind. This objective is demonstrated through the text's composition as a collection of interviews by Lonzi with fifteen artists: Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Carla Accardi, Pino Pascali, Guilio Paolini, Mario Nigro, Lucio Fontana, Getulio Alviani, Giulio Turcato, Pietro Consagra, Enrico Castellani, Paolini, Salvatore Scarpitta, and Mimmo Rotella. Cy Twombly was also present for the first interview, but he never spoke. Lonzi chose to respect this silence but acknowledged his presence among her assemblage of interviews, which were woven together from numerous conversations to appear as one large discussion.

In her preface Lonzi states that this discourse was born of a need to allow the artists to engage in a communal dialogue. During this time, Lonzi had growing doubts concerning the role of the art critic, whom she felt had the power to discriminate against the artist and to produce extraneous interpretations of artistic action.[49] She saw the art critic as outside the act of the artistic creation and judging artworks by false cultural models.[50] Because some of these interviews were originally conducted between Lonzi and a single artist, a collage of voices emerges and carries the artists' narratives in a free-flowing dialogue. While at times the merged conversations do not transition coherently from one topic to the next, certain shared concerns do become apparent. Discussions address the roles of the critic and the artist, and the institutionalization of art; interspersed throughout these conversations are comments by individual artists concerning their endeavors in their work. Just as the artists struggle with producing art that does not adhere to a single framework, Lonzi explained that she always

[49] Carla Lonzi, *Autoritratto* (Bari: De Donato, 1969), 5.
[50] Ibid., 5.

wanted to create a book that rambled. She wanted to avoid an organized conversation that passed systematically from one topic to the next and to avoid being an art critic that controlled the conversation in an attempt to produce specific ideas that fit within an established cultural rubric.[51] One artist, Luciano Fabro, remarked in the conversation that he saw art critics as mediocre artists who are concerned with making one thing at a time. In contrast, a good artist does not have this preoccupation; they know that an object develops over time.[52] Another artist, Kounellis, perceived the critic as both a mediator and an interpreter; the critic is someone who is concerned with integrating all things into the social system and interested in defending only what he or she saw.[53] Kounellis claims within the interview that he often chooses not to respond to critics; he wants only to face life on a daily basis with all his senses.[54] Lonzi agreed with these artists, seeing the critic and cultural institutions, such as the museum, which is more capable than a single artist in broadcasting a message, as negative forces in their power to deform the meaning of artists' works.[55] Lonzi believed that "instead of being an emissary to society, the critic should be an emissary of the artist."[56]

To further create a ramble, Lonzi wove throughout the texts in *Autoritratto* black and white images by the artists, omitting any captioning that would organize the narrative into a controlled form, allowing the image and words to be collaged together and merging the different artistic languages. The entanglement of voices and images refuses a direct, linear narrative as would be expected of a traditional text on art that organized artists by styles and movements. Most of these photographs are not of the artists' works but instead capture the artists in their

[51] Ibid., 22-23.
[52] Ibid., 31.
[53] Ibid., 31-32.
[54] Ibid., 34.
[55] Ibid., 32-34.
[56] Ibid., 78.

personal daily lives. The downplay of the artists' artworks, which are traditionally seen alongside the corresponding texts in art-historical publications, emphasized instead the subjectivity of the individual artist, the workings of their minds and their intentions.

As a contemporary art critic, Lonzi chose to withdraw from her position as outsider and to allow the artists to speak for themselves. Her voice became one among the many – a voice in unison – as she stepped back from an authoritative position of explanation. Her direct engagement with these artists allowed her to be a fellow traveler – as emissary – with the artists. This is a practice that Celant too would adopt to some degree as a fellow traveler, poetic accomplice, and "a soul mate who asked questions and could be questioned, but always sharing the feeling of a close collaboration."[57] Unlike Lonzi, though, Celant did not subordinate his voice in critical discourse and, furthermore, his position as a male art critic inevitably offered him an advantaged, insider footing. Furthermore, he characterized himself as a collaborator and not as a neutral agent. Lonzi, in fact, grew critical of her passive position as an art critic and the parameters within which she was working. Disillusioned, she recognized that art criticism and the art world were still part of the prevailing male establishment and therefore not a place to articulate her own feminine voice. In 1970, a year after *Autoritratto,* Lonzi published the "Manifesto of Rivolta Femminile" and "Sputiamo su Hegel" (Let's Spit on Hegel) both of which argued for women to reject mainstream patriarchal structures, such as politics and culture, in order to become authentic feminine subjects:

> *The mode of action we choose is the shedding of our culture.* It is not a cultural revolution that follows and integrates the economic revolution; it is not based on the verification at all levels of an ideology but on the lack of ideological necessity. Woman has opposed to the constructions of man only her existential dimension: she has not had generals, thinkers, and scientists. Instead she has had energy, thoughts, courage,

[57] Germano Celant, "A History among Stories," in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan: Electra, 2011), 23.

> dedication, attentiveness, common sense, and madness. The traces of all of this have disappeared because they were not destined to remain, but our strength lies in our refusal to create myths out of facts: action is not confined to any one group, but it becomes so when it addresses a specific form of power. Men have mastered this mechanism using culture as a justification. Giving the lie to culture means giving the lie to an evaluation of facts on the basis of power.[58]

In one of Lonzi's final art critical writings, a manifesto entitled *Assenza della donna dai momenti celebrativi della manifestzione creative maschile* (1971), she explains that the women of *Rivolta Femminile* refused to participate within the male-dominated art institutions that required women to be passive spectators to their actions. By refusing to accept or engage in the cultural paradigm constructed by men, women removed themselves from this dialogue, which therefore faltered as a soliloquy.

A related ambition to circumvent dominant cultural dialogues and prescribed actions resonates with Celant's 1967 manifesto written to describe the actions of contemporary Italian artists associated with Arte Povera: "The artist, who was exploited before, now becomes a guerilla warrior. He wants to choose his battlefield, to possess the advantages of mobility, to make surprise attacks – and not vice-versa."[59] Artists would no longer be exploited workers, like the housewives, minorities and the working class. Within the political guise as a guerilla warrior, these artists would defy standard practices, maneuvering themselves in unexpected directions and avoiding the path of conformity.

Other parallels can be found between Lonzi and Celant's similar approach to art criticism. Both took an anti-academic direction in their engagement with the artists and both created a style of art criticism that blended moments of time into a single dialogue, breaking

[58] Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel*, edited by Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 288-289.
[59] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 35.

from linear narrative as established practice in art writing. Though not directly mirroring Lonzi, Celant also allows his writings to go in many directions within a single text, weaving a variety of viewpoints into his explanations of art when drawing upon the sources of the larger context from which the artist produces her or his work. A respect for the artist's intentions and voice is also demonstrated by Celant's curatorial practice, in which he endorses the artists' freedom to install their works in the manner they choose.[60]

Lonzi was not the only influential figure Celant met during his travels as the editor of *Marcatré*. Celant also met leading gallery owners who would introduce him to numerous contemporary artists. Through his travels to Turin, Celant became acquainted with Giulio Paolini, and it was this friendship that led him to meet Luciano Pistoi, an influential art critic and dealer who was a leading figure in the postwar Italian art scene who promoted contemporary artists working in new materials and techniques.[61] In 1958 Pistoi opened Galleria Notizie, an important gallery that exhibited the work of young artists as well as enabling them to gain access to and knowledge of established artists operating internationally, such as Cy Twombly, Jackson Pollock, Wols, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana, and Louise Nevelson. Pistoi also collaborated with important art critics such as Carla Lonzi and the French art critic Michel Tapié. Pistoi was the first in Western Europe to organize an exhibition of the Japanese group of artists, the Gutai Group. Following this show, Pistoi included the Japanese artists in a much larger exhibition in 1959. Collaborating with Tapié, the two produce a rare international exhibition that included 91 artists, among them: Jackson Pollock, Willem De Kooning, Sam Francis, Georges

[60] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 19th, 2013.
[61] In the last decade there has been an increased attention to the documentation of gallerists who advanced contemporary art. An important publisher in the field of contemporary Italian art is hopefulmonster. In 2000 hopefulmonster published an account of the career of the gallery owner Gian Enzo Sperone. Following this publication was hopefulmonster's 2008 collection of essays on Luciano Pistoi: Mirella Bandini, Maria Cristina Mundici, Maria Teresa Roberto, *Luciano Pistoi "insegno un mio disegno"* (Turin: hopefulmonster, 2008).

Mathieu, Antoni Tàpies, Wols, Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana, Emilio Vedova and Carla Accardi.[62] In addition to supporting artists from abroad, Pistoi also promoted the careers of many young Italian artists such as Piero Manzoni, Mario Merz, Pino Pascali, Giulio Paolini and Luciano Fabro. Reminiscing on his acquaintance with Pistoi, Celant recounted that the gallery owner enabled him to see his first Jackson Pollock painting in person as well as the works of Cy Twombly and Wols.[63]

Another gallery owner to influence Celant's early career and the careers of numerous young Italian artists with whom Celant would also be engaged in a dialogue was Remo Pastori, who opened Il Punto Gallery, under the direction of Gian Enzo Sperone. [64] It was here that Celant recalls meeting the individual artists who would help form his conception of Arte Povera.[65] After working for Pastori, Sperone too would become an important gallery owner when he opened his own exhibition space under his own name in Turin in 1963 and established himself as a leader in recognizing the important research occurring in contemporary art on both sides of the Atlantic. Sperone helped to open the Italian art scene to latest artistic research occurring in New York as well as disseminating the work of Italian artists abroad. He became further seated within the contemporary art scene when he later opened galleries in Rome and New York in 1972.[66]

During the early 1960s, groups of Italian artists seeking to develop a collaborative dialogue met at hip cafés, visited each other's studios, exchanged letters through the post, and

[62] Luciano Pistoi, 25.
[63] Celant, *Arte Povera: History and Stories*, 22.
[64] Anna Minola, *Gian Enzo Sperone: Torino, Roma, New York : 35 anni di mostre tra Europa e America* (Torino: Hopefulmonster Editore, 2000), 14. Sperone was a dealer who continually supported the work of Arte Povera artists and was later in the 1980s a proponent of the Italian Transavantgarde movement that became an international phenomenon.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Minola, 14.

when finances allowed, travelled to distant cities. Many artists also began to gather around Il Punto and Sperone Gallery in Turin, both focal points of much of the artistic research occurring in the 1960s in Italy.[67] Of these artists one of the most prominent in forging a strong and far-reaching dialogue with artists and other art world figures was the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto. Sperone acknowledged that his relationship with Pistoletto at the beginning of his career as a gallery director was a pivotal relationship that shaped his training as a gallerist.[68] It was Pistoletto, along with the artist Aldo Mondino, who supported the nomination of Sperone to his first role of gallery director at Il Punto gallery after his work at Mario Tazzoli's gallery Galatea from 1961-1963.[69] It was also through Pistoletto that Sperone made the acquaintance of gallery directors Ileana and Michael Sonnabend in Paris who were already promoting the work of American Pop and Minimalist artists.[70] This fateful encounter led to Sperone's first gallery staging of a 1963 solo show of the work of the American Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. The following year when Sperone opened his own gallery, it was launched with an exhibition of Robert Rauschenberg's work, only a few days before Rauschenberg opened his show at the Venice Biennale that led to his being awarded the Grand International Prize for Painting only months later. Showings of other contemporary American artists would follow at Sperone's gallery, including Andy Warhol's first one-man show in Italy in 1966.[71] Among the other artists who received their first solo shows at Sperone's gallery were Piero Gilardi, Marisa Merz, Mario Merz, Giovanni Anselmo, Giuseppe Penone, and Gilberto Zorio. In addition to the numerous contemporary Italian artists shown in Sperone's gallery, American artists who were offered

[67] Ibid., 22. Celant mentions the Paris Bar in Berlin, Caffè Rosati in Rome and Max's Kansas City in New York as three center spots for artists to meet and discuss their work. Celant, "A History among Stories," 21.
[68] Ibid., 17.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 22.
[71] Ibid., 18

shows in the 1960s included Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Walter De Maria, and Joseph Kosuth. Artists from Europe who showed in this space included Richard Long, Gilbert and George, Gerry Schum, Jan Dibbets and Daniel Buren.[72]

Pistoletto's friendship with Sperone led not only to a variety of avant-garde exhibitions by contemporary young artists, but also to an environment that encouraged a strong collaborative spirit among these artists and encouraged further innovative artistic research. It had been Pistoletto and the artist Piero Gilardi who introduced Gilberto Zorio to Sperone.[73] Through Zorio, Giuseppe Penone was introduced to Sperone, who invited the artist to show a few of his works in the gallery in 1969.[74] Penone met Zorio in 1966 at the Accademia Albertina and through Zorio came to know Gilardi, Pistoletto and Giovanni Anselmo.[75] It was also Pistoletto who introduced Pino Pascali to Sperone in 1966. Pascali had proposed a show of his "weapons" to the gallery La Tartaruga in Rome, but had been refused. Sperone welcomed the artist and his work. This exchange encouraged Sperone to look into the activities of artists in Rome. Pascali's show inspired the young Zorio, who found the art scene of Turin in the early 1960s depressing. For Zorio, Pascali's show was an "explosion of vitality" and contributed to changing the climate of Italian contemporary art.[76] Zorio also came to know Mario and Marisa Merz through an exhibition of Marisa Merz's work held at Sperone in 1966. According to Zorio, it was through the organization of shows by Sperone at the University of Genoa and the Galleria la Bertesca that led Celant to gather the group that came to be known as "Arte Povera."[77] For example, Celant met Penone when the artist was nineteen and walked into the Sperone gallery one day with

[72] Minola, 38-39.
[73] Ibid., 25 and 33-35.
[74] Ibid., 35.
[75] Mirella Bandini, *Arte povera a Torino: 1972 : interviste a Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti*... (Torino: U. Allemandi, 2002), 66-67.
[76] Ibid., 96.
[77] Ibid., 99-100.

photographs of his tree sculptures. Celant happened to be there and immediately invited him to join Arte Povera. In addition to Celant's presence within the gallery scene, he also came to know many artists directly by visiting their studios and often staying in their studios during his lengthy travels.[78]

It was during these years of the early 1960s, through his numerous travels, that Celant developed his role as an independent art critic. In 1963, Celant attended two conferences, the Gruppo '63 conference in Palermo and the Critica d'Arte conference at Verucchio, both of which revealed to him, he recalls, "the relationship that exists between theory and power."[79] According to Celant, another important moment in his early career was attending the 1964 Venice Biennale and meeting Claes Oldenburg and Robert Rauschenberg. This encounter exposed him to some of the latest artistic practices in the U.S.[80] It was also this same year that Celant travelled to Paris and met gallerist Ileana Sonnabend, who had recently shown Rauschenberg's work before the Venice Biennale.[81] Celant perceived 1964 as a turning point in his life. He made the decision to take his career in an international direction and look at the larger scope of developments occurring in the contemporary art world. Celant chose to be an independent art scholar instead of becoming an art historian within academia, which he perceived as being controlled by nepotism and other preferential treatment given to the lackeys of the system.[82] Part of the reason Celant chose to become a freelance, international art critic was due in part to the state of the Italian art world that, according to Celant, "leaves no room for the younger generations, nor does it acknowledge their contribution."[83] Instead Celant chose the life of an unfettered scholar who

[78] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.
[79] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 21.
[80] Celant, "A History among Stories," 22.
[81] Ibid.; Laura de Coppet and Alan Jones, *The Art Dealers* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1984), 114.
[82] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.
[83] Celant, "A History among Stories," 20.

roamed the art world, befriending artists with whom he shared similar interests and attitudes towards art, engaging them in dialogue and finding the words to speak of their work. It was during these formative years in which he chose to take direct action, travelling great distances to create connections, asking all he came in contact with for the latest news in artistic practices, and fostering the radical research of contemporary artists, that Celant emerged into the international contemporary art world poised to make a difference.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING ARTE POVERA

During Celant's travels throughout Italy in the early 1960s, as he wrote for various art journals and curated gallery shows, he realized the necessity of organizing and analyzing the new, dynamic forms of artistic research occurring in Italy. Through his experience collecting original works of art for the Museo Sperimentale d'Arte Contemporanea and his acquaintance with gallery owners such as Ileana Sonnabend and Gian Enzo Sperone, Celant was able to quickly make contact with many contemporary avant-garde artists working in Italy. Celant's friendship with these artists and his growing understanding and appreciation of their working methods crystallized in his 1967 La Galleria Bertesca show, "Arte Povera-Im Spazio," curated by Celant and held in Genoa from mid-September to mid-October [fig. 1]. In this dual exhibition the newly designated "Arte Povera" artists, Alighiero Boetti, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali and Emilio Prini, were shown together with the artists associated with the "Im Spazio" portion of the show: Umberto Bignardi, Mario Ceroli, Paolo Icaro, Renato Mambor, Eliseo Mattiacci, and Cesare Tacchi.[84]

This was not the first exhibition grouping of many of these artists. Pre-dating Celant's coining of "Arte Povera" were shows such as "Arte Abitabile" held in April 1966 at the Galleria Sperone in Turin that mounted the work of Boetti, Giovanni Anselmo, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Giulio Piacentino. In June 1967 established Italian art critics Maurizio Calvesi and Alberto Boatto curated a show of works by Kounellis, Pascali, Pistoletto, Ceroli and Piero Gilardi at the

[84] For this exhibition Celant conceived of two distinct modes of artistic practice that grappled with the similar issue of the artistic environment. The artists in "Im Spazio" (meaning "image space") created closed and ordered artistic environments into which the spectator entered. In contrast was the "Arte Povera" half of the show that contained works by artists who Celant saw as producing open artistic environments that invited viewers to participate in artistic creation. Germano Celant, "Im spazio. Possibili punti di scambio tra ricerca architettonica e ricerca formale," *Casabella* 318 (September 1967), 61-63.

Galleria L'Attico in Rome for the exhibition "Lo Spazio degli elementi. Fuoco, Immagine, Acqua, Terra." These, along with other gallery shows, confirmed the growing recognition of certain emerging young artists within the contemporary Italian art scene. At first, therefore, Celant's "Arte Povera" grouping of these artists was a continuation of this stream of progressive gallery exhibitions, yet within the following two years, the momentum of "Arte Povera" would launch these artists even more prominently into an international arena. Celant's intentions with the creation of the term "Arte Povera" as well as the term's relevancy and capability of accurately describing these artists' works has been questioned by leading contemporary art scholars over the last half century. To address these unresolved issues, this chapter offers a chronological historiography of Celant's writings on Arte Povera as well as an analysis of his texts and the sources from which he drew inspiration, both literary and visual works of art. This analysis will also address Celant's rhetorical style during these early transformative years.

While primarily focusing on the continual evolution of Celant's explanation of "Arte Povera," this chapter will bring also into its discussion other scholars of "Arte Povera" who offered their own nuanced interpretations of the term. These include Italian art critics such Achille Bonito Oliva and Luigi Menghelli as well as the American art historian and curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the Italian art historian and critic Giovanni Lista, the German art historian and curator Bettina Ruhrberg and the American art critic Dan Cameron. Though many of these scholars have been critical of Celant and the term "Arte Povera," none has provided a persuasive argument for abandoning the term. Their commentary has, in fact, fueled interest in this group of artists by continuing a debate about the term's relevancy.

For the first exhibition of Arte Povera at Galleria La Bertesca, Celant conceived "Arte Povera" as referencing an artistic practice that related to the human experience of contemporary reality within the present moment. In his writings Celant paid particular attention to the artists' use of common, banal materials in an un-manipulated manner, and placed special emphasis on the conceptual and linguistic dimension of Arte Povera productions. In his text for the Bertesca exhibit, Celant describes the "poverty" of the new artists in literary terms: "The linguistic process consists now in taking away, eliminating, downgrading things to a minimum, impoverishing signs to reduce them to their archetypes. We are in a period of de-culture. Iconographic conventions fall and symbolic and conventional languages crumble."[85] An illustration of the semiotic dimension of many of the artists' works shown in this exhibit is Paolini's *Lo spazio* [fig. 2]. For this work Paolini attached white, wooden letters that spelled out "Lo spazio" which were placed at eye-level and spread out individually across the white gallery walls so that as viewers entered the room and walked past each letter they could access the entire word as they moved through the space of the gallery. This work provoked questions about the distinction between the art located on the walls and the lived environment as a work of art, the continuum of space and time in viewers' experience of the composition and the multiple layers of interpretation embedded within the signs.

In a similar move that reduced the art work to its literal elements and exposed the myriad of potent readings of a physical sign, Kounellis displayed a steel structure containing coal approximately four feet by five feet and one foot off the floor. Placed at the feet of viewers, the work might have easily been overlooked as a large coal bin, though in fact it was a response to hundreds of years of cultural history and in dialogue with the latest artistic research occurring on

[85] Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera* (Milan: Electra, 1985), 31-33.

both sides of the Atlantic. Celant's accompanying explanation of the semiotics of coal situates Kounellis' work within these contexts:

> Ways of defining are reduced to ways of acting and being…. A univocal sign-language expresses 'all the possible formative and organizational processes,' freed from all historical and worldly contingency…. Physical presence dissimulates itself and makes its importance known merely by being.... Day to day naturalness, unmasked, is violated in its taboo of triviality. Stripped and denuded, it, too, is thoroughly examinated [sic] as a linguistic paradigm. Thus the fire of Kounellis' flower is reduced to coal. The way of being is left to the use, to the material. Whether the 'other' significance of coal is fire, or the 'other' significance of fire is coal, is unimportant, for the two are not mutually exclusive. It is sufficient to extinguish or light a flame to bring to focus the naked presence and objective existence of a simple flame and a common heap of coal. Our two alternatives are simply two moments of a concrete understanding at odds with conceptual reductivism (the fire of the altar, will-o'-the-wisp, purifying fire, fire of destruction; or coal, mother earth, coal as symbol of industriousness, of the advent of the industrial age, and so on).[86]

The "flower" of fire which Celant references is another untitled work created by Kounellis in 1967, the first of many of the artist's creations that utilized a flaming blowtorch. The artist's use of fire has been interpreted by scholars as having deep cultural implications.[87] Celant's statement acknowledges that although these works potentially evoke eras of symbolic connotations, they are meant first and foremost to evoke the "real." Kounellis corroborates this statement:

> The symbolic meaning of fire is always pushed to the fore. I'm not interested in that. For me, fire is something real, just as real as rock, it fits into the exhibition space. Needless to say, there are all sorts of myths associated with fire that play with symbols, but fire is first

[86] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 33.

[87] For example, Thomas McEvilley discusses fire within Kounellis' works as symbolic of transformation, punishment, destruction, and social change [Thomas McEvilley, "Mute Prophecies: The Art of Jannis Kounellis," in *Jannis Kounellis* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 62]; Celant has related Kounellis' use of fire to its association with prophecy [Germano Celant, "L'urto e l'urlo," in *Jannis Kounellis* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1983), 11]; and Bruno Cora saw Kounellis' fire as tied to multiple historic-iconographic references: "At a person's eye-level, the tongue of 'fires' evokes the tragic condition of the dance. The sound of the simultaneous combustion produces an ardent vocal sonority suggestive of a purifying song, the continuity of pain, the idea of redemption and a deeply resonant vibration of the sense. The 'fires' mark a further descent towards the roots of the Humanist tradition and bring back to the surface unsuspected lights and murmurs of a medieval *pathos.*" [Bruno Corà, "Kounellis: A New Language of Painting in the Drama of Current Reality," in *Kounellis* (Prato: Gli Ori, 2001), 20].

> and foremost something very physical; the butane gas flame makes a very characteristic sound. What is more, it warms. The symbolic aspect recedes into the background here.[88]

Celant's insistence on recognizing the direct presence of Kounellis' work and that of other Arte Povera artists delineates a significant aspect of his concept of Arte Povera. In semiotic terms, this work can speak on many levels, which Celant acknowledges, but works such as this, stripped to their essential elements, also denote the "naked presence" of the object in the present moment. Celant stresses that an experience of an Arte Povera object is not merely conceptual: it is also sensual and physical. Tied to the visceral nature of Arte Povera works is the importance of the artists' actions, gestures and the process of making their art. This emphasis is a point Celant further developed in his later writings as he focused more upon the contingency and ephemeral nature of the artworks. Celant's conclusion of his Bertesca text signals this direction: "Corporeality of material and gesture, which are always real and palpable in others, are brought into relation with our own bodies. And with this we reach the real terrain of Arte povera."[89] Here Celant emphasizes that this group of artists was setting new precedents with their artistic practices by working with materials and imagery stripped of dogmatic or ideological content and by encouraging viewers to engage directly with each work in order to have a more immediate sensorial experience. Standing before one of Kounellis' fire pieces, which are in a continual state of transformation as the fire consumes the oxygen, the viewer's metaphorical interpretations of the fire falter as the searing heat prickles the skin and burns the eyes, the sounds of fire and gas sizzle and pop in the ear, and the smell of smoke permeates the air.

Celant's short, intense text references not only the Italian artists participating in the show, but also locates their work within a larger international context by drawing connections to the

[88] Friedemann Malsch, Christiane Meyer-Stoll, and Valentina Pero, eds., *Che fare? Arte Povera – The Historic Years* (Heidelberg: Kehrer; London: Turnaround, 2010), 152.
[89] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 33.

unconventional films of Andy Warhol and Thom Andersen as well as to the plays of the experimental Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski. Celant's decision to use the term "*povero"* was influenced by Grotowski's manifesto *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1965),[90] in which he clarifies his concept of "poor theater." Grotowski believed that the role of the theater had derailed from its intrinsic purpose: to produce a cathartic event for the viewer.[91] Because of theater's competition with television and cinema to draw a crowd, it had become engorged with excessive trappings and was reliant on the techniques of other disciplines to convey a message. Grotowski called this type of production a "rich theatre" and contrasted it with the "poor theatre," which was reduced to its basic, necessary elements: the actors and the audience.[92] In Grotowski's plays, both the actors and the spectators were placed within the same spatial environment. For example, in Grotowski's staging of the play *Kordian*, the spectators would become patients within a mental hospital [fig. 3]. Plays such as this used the most minimal of props and relied on direct interaction between the actors and the audience to construct the narrative. Celant relates this concept of "poor theater" to the artists in the Bertesca exhibition text: "They [the artists] want to observe and record the univocality of reality, and not its ambiguity as in the past. They eliminate from their inquiry all that which may seem mimetic reflection and representation or linguistic custom in order to attain a new kind of art, which, to borrow a term from the theater of Grotowski, one may call 'poor'."[93]

Following the Bertesca show, Celant firmly established the term "Arte Povera" as the name for a new artistic practice when he published an essay-manifesto, "Arte Povera: Notes for a

[90] Jerzy Grotowski (b. 1933, Rzeszów – d. 1999, Pontedera).
[91] Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 256.
[92] Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 213-214.
[93] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 31.

Guerrilla War,"[94] in which he took Arte Povera in a more political direction and drew a clear distinction between the Italians and contemporary American Pop, Minimalist and Op artists. The artists of "poor" art were now described as "guerrilla fighters," evasively outmaneuvering the regimented and technologically based American "apprentice jesters" who produced "rich art."

In 1967, when Celant's essay-manifesto was written, the escalating violence in Vietnam and its full coverage in the media brought the violence into daily reality. Celant's use of the term "guerrilla warfare" suggests allusions to the guerrilla fighting tactics of the Viet Cong and Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* (1961), but it can also be related to the discussion of cultural guerrilla warfare published by Celant's acquaintance, Umberto Eco. In his 1967 essay "Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare,"[95] Eco calls for scholars and technicians of communication to resist the messages of mass media and to engage in cultural guerrilla combat.[96] This call for resistance was a response to Marshall McLuhan's analysis of mass media in his influential 1964 book *Understanding Media*. In this text McLuhan famously argued that "[s]ocieties have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" and that we are living now in a new world in which daily experience is redefined by electronic technology.[97] Electronic technology has made the world a smaller place, a "global village," an information megalopolis. Eco responded to McLuhan's analysis of mass media and the new "global village" with a strategy of resistance.[98] In order to maintain

[94] Germano Celant. "Arte Povera: Appunti per una guerriglia." *Flash Art*, no. 5 (Nov/Dec, 1967): 3.
[95] Umberto Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare," in *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1983), 135-144.
[96] Eco, 142-143.
[97] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media; The Extensions of Man*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 8.
[98] Eco, 137. McLuhan actually shared in Eco's concern over the developments of electric culture. He chose to counter potential crises by raising awareness of the new changes occurring with technology and how they might affect political and social institutions.

humankind's freedom from the totalizing power of centralized communications, Eco believes that it will be necessary to adopt guerrilla tactics:

> Precisely when the communication systems envisage a single industrialized source and a single message that will reach an audience scattered all over the world, we should be capable of imagining systems of complementary communication that allow us to reach every individual human group, every individual member of the universal audience, to discuss the arriving message in the light of the codes at the destination, comparing them with the codes of the source….
>
> Mind you: I am not proposing a new and more terrible form of control of public opinion. I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation….
>
> …it could be that these nonindustrial forms of communication (from the love-in to the rally of students seated on the grass of the campus) can become the forms of a future communications guerrilla warfare – a manifestation complementary to the manifestation of Technological Communication, the constant correction of perspectives, the checking of codes, the ever renewed interpretations of mass messages.[99]

Celant's call for guerrilla warfare can be read in this political and cultural context. In "Notes for a Guerrilla War," Celant writes: "Man is the message, to paraphrase McLuhan. In the visual arts freedom is a germ that contaminates all production. The artist rejects all labels and identifies solely with himself."[100] Celant calls this new individual, who is capable of creating new forms of non-industrial communication, the guerrilla warrior "who wants to choose his battlefield, to possess the advantages of mobility, to make surprise attacks – not vice-versa."[101] An enemy Celant singled out for attack by these guerrillas was what he regarded as the technological and sophisticated work of U.S. Minimalist, Pop and Op artists.

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[99] Ibid, 142.
[100] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 35-37. Christov-Bakargiev makes a similar point about the message of Arte Povera being 'the self experiencing the world' in her 1999 survey (Christov-Bakargiev, 24); the majority of her scholarship on Arte Povera seeks to locate the artists and their work within a complex cultural-historical context. In this survey, Christov-Bakargiev discusses the different branches of philosophical research that were being conducted during these artists' maturation and that were most likely influential to their work.
[101] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 35.

One of the primary reasons Celant decided to promote Arte Povera in the 1960s was that he perceived a need to create an artistic front against the oppression of a dominant world power, which for him was the United States, and in particular its expression through the leading art movements of the time, Minimalism and Pop Art. While Celant was critical of these two U.S. movements that were, in his mind, the artistic embodiment of American consumerism and technology that had seeped into and contaminated post-war Italian culture, the impetus behind Celant's organization of artists under the term "Arte Povera" was also inspired by the celebration of American Pop Art that had recently received accolades in the 1964 Venice Biennale. While Celant's rhetoric at the time conveys a strong critique, his later recollection advances a more nuanced reading of these movements. Whereas the research of Pop artists held some interest for the Italian artists, the Arte Povera artists' engagement with Minimalist art raised ire as well as interest. Throughout his writings on Arte Povera artists, Celant repeatedly contrasts their research with that of the American Minimalists. This critique was in part his response to the dismissive statements concerning European art by leading Minimalist artist Donald Judd published in *Art News* in 1966: "I'm totally uninterested in European art and I think it's over with."[102] In an interview from the early 1980s, [103] Celant reflected upon the antagonism that originated in Judd's article, which attacked European artists for producing complex, baroque art that failed to achieve the rigor of the simplicity and essentiality of New York painting and sculpture. Celant explains that Judd's dismissal of European art only incentivized the Italian artists to embrace their "defects" and create a new artistic language. In order to maintain their anthropological outlook and avoid falling in line with the standardized, systematic and

[102]Bruce Gaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," in *Minimal Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 154.
[103] This interview published in *Arte Povera Art Povera* (Milan: Electra, 1985) was a compilation of interviews that had been conducted by a variety of different critics between 1980 and 1985; the critics that were listed included: Allemandi, Froment, Gianelli, Paz, Sischy, Tazzi, Vescovo, and Zacharapolous.

technological production of American minimalism, Arte Povera artists embraced natural materials and processes to open and break down cultural hegemonies.[104]

For Celant, Minimalism was the antithesis of the vital and unrestricted art of Arte Povera; it exemplified the monumental, technological, ordered, rigid, and rationalized mentality of the U.S. that both lacked and rejected the historical and cultural intricacy of Europe. Arte Povera and Minimalism share commonalities such as un-manipulated industrial materials and works that directly engage the physicality of the viewer. The two movements are truly distinct, however, in that Minimalist artists such as Judd, Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt searched for unity and wholeness through repetition and serial units. The repetitions of forms within Minimalist compositions were often set within grid-like spacing and were not integrated fully into the external environment. Celant associated the work of Minimalist artists such as Judd with a "rich attitude linked by osmosis to the system's sophisticated tools and wealth of information, an attitude that imitates and mediates reality, which determines the dichotomy between art and life, public behavior and private life."[105] Arte Povera artists, in contrast, used a bricolage of organic and inorganic materials that were often in a state of transformation and which adapted to the environment within which they were installed.

The interplay and contrasts between Minimalism and Arte Povera can be illustrated through a comparison of Arte Povera artist Jannis Kounellis' 1967 untitled installation in the Galleria L'Attico in Rome [fig. 4] and Judd's untitled 1980-84 aluminum works located in Marfa, Texas [fig. 5]. Although each of the 100 rectangles initially looks the same, each is unique and interacts with the light and space differently, with an open panel within each box that

[104] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 25.
[105] Ibid., 35.

allows the viewer to peer inside, thus making the work physically interactive. The high polish of the mill aluminum allows the objects to reflect their environment: as the light and weather changes, so too does the work itself. The experience of viewing each of the boxes varies for each viewer and is also dependent on the external world.[106]

Kounellis' installation also included industrial metal rectangular containers aligned on the floor in a serial repetition, but instead of sealing these shapes off into autonomous geometric units, Kounellis filled each bin with earth and live cacti. Kounellis loaded another larger box-like steel container with raw cotton that overflows from the tops and the sides (the sides of the cube do not meet, which allows for the cotton to pour out from all angles). Across the room from the steel cubes overflowing with life, Kounellis attached a steel panel to the wall with a small perch on which stood a live parrot. While Judd sought to heighten the viewer's awareness of the space and atmosphere surrounding his work, Kounellis' installation takes this a step further. The space in his composition was filled with rich smells, sounds, textures and colors. The organic elements are mutable and suggest a continuum of art and life.[107] Though Judd's work does undergo transformations through its interaction with the surrounding space and transition of time, which are also elements central to Arte Povera works, Celant considered Judd's work "rich" in his perpetuation of technological, consumerist production and in his objective of maintaining the work's pristine unity of form. Kounellis, in contrast, produces works that appear "rich" in texture, color and energy, yet are for Celant "poor" in that they are not intended to be permanent objects, but instead are meant to provide direct interactions between viewer and object that suggest the impermanent and fractured nature of existence.

[106]James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 186.
[107]Jannis Kounellis, Thomas McEvilley, and Mary Jane Jacob, *Jannis Kounellis* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 52.

Unlike Minimalism, certain aspects of Pop Art, in particular its embrace of the banal in everyday life, were accepted by Celant in his first essay on Arte Povera for the 1967 La Bertesca exhibition catalogue in which he listed alongside Arte Povera works a film by Andy Warhol. In *Sleep* (1963) Warhol captures the drama of the ordinary without manipulating the medium (in this instance a shot of a man sleeping for twelve hours) [fig. 6]. Yet Celant and many of the Arte Povera artists rejected the U.S. Pop artists' ironical embrace of the visual technologies of consumerism. The Benday dots of Lichtenstein, and the seriality of Warhol's silkscreens, mimicked the seriality of technical production, which further distinguished their work from the more individual, hand-crafted techniques of Arte Povera artists. The Pop artists, furthermore, remained aloof from critiques of consumer society's mediation and control.[108]

According to Celant, unlike the "poor" Arte Povera artists who created impoverished signs as a form of cultural critique, these Americans were kleptomaniacs, drawing from pre-established languages, ideologies, and artistic styles. These artists were part of the larger institutional system and made no effort to question or free themselves from its dictates. Instead they produced objects that fed the consumer system. In order to keep production lines rolling, the artist worked within pre-determined norms. Describing the Americans in his 1967 manifesto, Celant writes:

> Thus, in a world dominated by inventions and technological imitations, one has but two alternatives: The first involves the assimilation (by cleptomania [sic]) of the system or its codified and artificial languages in a convenient dialogue with the existing social or individual structures; acceptation and ideological pseudo-analysis; osmosis with every apparent and immediately integrated 'revolution;' the placement of one's work in the abstract microcosm (op), in the socio-cultural macrocosm (pop), or in the formalist

[108] Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art in association with W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 83.

> macrocosm (primary structures) . The second alternative is the opposite of the first: the free self-projection of human activity.[109]

The alternative Celant endorsed was an approach to art-making that placed the viewer and his or her experiences of reality at the center of the artists' research. By stripping from their art any conventional meaning or value, so that the art object could no longer convey a conventionalized belief or dogma, Arte Povera artists sought to provide viewers with an immediate, phenomenological experience that would enrich their understanding of themselves with an immersion in the contingency of the moment.[110] Recalling Eco's call for a semiological guerrilla warfare, Celant wrote that the individual artist must find a way "that refuses dialogue with both the cultural and social systems, and that aspires to present itself as something sudden and unforeseen with respect to conventional expectations: an asystematic way of living in a world where the system is everything."[111] This line of thinking can be illustrated by one of the first personal encounters between Arte Povera artists and the American art scene.

Michelangelo Pistoletto, an established artist prior to his inclusion within Arte Povera and who has remained in the last half century a leader of the Italian art world, began producing "mirror paintings" in the early 1960s, which consisted at first of photographic images transferred by hand to tissue paper and applied to highly polished stainless steel. Later the tissue paper was replaced with silkscreens of photographic images. These paintings were quickly picked up by the Parisian gallery owner, Ileana Sonnabend, who also exhibited works by Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. Through Sonnabend's promotion Pistoletto became known as a Pop artist in

[109] Germano Celant, "Arte povera: Notes for a guerrilla war," in *Arte Povera: History and Stories* (Milan: Electra, 2011), 35.
[110] Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, 25.
[111] Causey, 144.

America and was given a solo exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery in Minneapolis in 1966.[112] Sonnabend and her ex-husband, the gallery owner Leo Castelli, encouraged Pistoletto to leave Italy and move to America in order to further his artistic career. Pistoletto's refusal to uproot himself and work in a single style led to a break between the artist and Sonnabend and for many years Pistoletto refused to produce the mirror paintings that had brought him commercial success.[113]

Unlike U.S. Pop Art, which reflects only the artificial screen of daily life in consumer culture, Pistoletto's objective in his mirror paintings was to emphasize the contingency of human existence within reality.[114] In works such as *Two Naked Women Dancing* (1962 – 1964) [fig. 7] he expands the two-dimensional surface of a painting into a third-dimensional space. This space within the mirror is in a constant state of flux, for whatever is reflected in the mirror cannot be held there permanently. When viewers stands in front of the mirror they become part of the object; art transforms the viewer and the viewer transforms the art. In 1966, Pistoletto reminisced about his first mirror painting exhibition and the interaction between his work and the viewer:

> [T]he painted man came forward as if alive in the live space of the room, but the real protagonist was the relationship of instantaneousness created between the viewer, their reflection, and the painted figure in an ever 'present' movement that concentrated past and future within itself to such an extent as to make one doubt the existence of either—it was in the dimension of time.[115]

After publication of his 1967 manifesto, Celant, Pistoletto, and the other Arte Povera artists were invited to the Galleria de' Fosherari in Bologna in 1968. For this second show of Arte Povera works, Celant continued to promote Arte Povera within a new framework. This

[112] Claire Gilman, "Arte Povera's Theater: Artifice and Anti-Modernism in Italian Art of the 1960s" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006), 37.
[113] Gilman, 38.
[114] Germano Celant, *Michelangelo Pistoletto* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 21.
[115] Celant, *Michelangelo Pistoletto*, 71.

exhibition's catalogue text was adapted from Celant's previous *Flash Art* article with further emphasis on Arte Povera as a group of artists who aimed to bridge the division of art and life and who were hostile to the technology, institutions and dogma that disconnects people from a more authentic and direct existence. For Celant, Arte Povera artists emphasized action and ideas over products and sought to produce an experience of presentness for the viewer:

> Ideas, events, facts, and actions visualized and materialized are, in fact, the focal points of the simultaneity of idea and image. They lead to a broadening of experience regarding particular ideas, facts, and actions. They are unambiguous. They are the visual embodiment of a natural and human fact or law. It is not important if the "things" that result are executed in a "particular" material ("materials are the greatest afflictions of contemporary art," Le Witt), or if they respond to previous realization of the artist that made them or of others. A visualized and materialized idea does not contain a program. It does not follow an individual or social history, it is solely the presentation of a term. It does not accept relations. It does not represent, it presents. As everything made lives in the revelry of discontinuity, outlaws the "study" of the system, it appears as an element of the author's concrete knowledge. His instrumental universe is finite, it adapts to the material he has at hand at the moment of conception. It is a contingent whole, it has absolutely nothing to do with the past or the future. It is just as it is, finished in time to be present, it expresses a "real perception of contingency" (Pistoletto).[116]

The de' Fosherari exhibition helped to further disseminate the term "Arte Povera" to a broader audience and instigated a response by entrenched leaders of the Italian art world who expressed concern over the radical nature of Celant's rhetoric. In his 1968 essay, "Art and Life," for example, the Italian art critic Pietro Bonfiglioli questioned the feasibility of art and life ever being truly united by artists as Celant suggested in his text and argued that, aside from theoretical arguments for the unity of art and life, the two can only truly be bridged by political acts.[117]

In October 1968 in the small coastal town of Amalfi, Celant curated an artistic event that firmly established his presence within the Italian art scene. For the exhibition "Arte povera + azione povera," a title that conveyed the artists' increased attention at the time to Performance

[116] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 51.
[117] Ibid., 65.

and Process Art which stressed a continuity between art and bodily action, Celant focused his definition of the movement on the dematerialization of the art object and the emphasis placed by the artists on artistic acts. In his exhibition catalogue, Celant describes these activities:

> It was a search,…, for vital and dialectic relations with reality, and a rejection of reassuring formulas and details that respond to the expectations of the system and of the technological intellectual – a rejection of being as exposure to something other than oneself by means of a complete osmosis between action and body, thought and body, energy and the individual, immediate consumption of the critical-esthetic event, directly placed outside consumption and direct passage from Arte Povera to Azione Povera.[118]

Celant had been invited by the Italian art patron and collector Marcello Rummi to curate this exhibition, which involved twenty-four artists, primarily from Italy, but also from the Netherlands and Great Britain. Celant invited academicians as well as free-lance art critics from Italy to join in the three-day event. Those who attended were freelance art critics such as Gillo Dorfles, Tommaso Trini and Achille Bonito Oliva. Giulio Carlo Argan, one of Italy's leading art history professors who taught at the University of Rome, discouraged other academics from participating in this event. For Celant this professional rebuke signaled his success. If the pillars of the art establishment turned their interests from these contemporary artists, their response signaled that their avant-garde practices challenged accepted norms.[119]

All the activities that occurred during "Arte povera + azione povera," from the artists installing their own works to the debates among artists and critics, were recognized as part of the artistic happenings. For one action-based work, the Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets rowed a small boat out into the Amalfi Sea in order to stretch a ten-meter long white line created out of eight painted wooden sticks 150 centimeters long. The sticks had been attached in a line connected to the coast and extending out into the water. The work was both sculptural and

[118] Ibid., 89.
[119] Ibid.

painterly as it floated slightly beneath the water's surface [figs. 8 and 9]. In another action, the British Land Artist Richard Long stood in the town square and shook the hands of passing people [fig. 10]. Inside the Arsenal the Dutch artist Ger van Elk poured glue in the shape of a ring onto the floor, which he then spread into a circle that he covered in litter he collected from the surrounding area [fig. 11]. Similarly, Arte Povera artists were working independently and collaboratively both inside and outside the Arsenal, creating works that incorporated the surrounding environment and in a state of continual transformation. Marisa Merz, for example, knitted shoes for herself out of nylon thread and then placed these shoes on the beach, allowing the waves of the incoming tide to carry them away [fig. 12]. Gilberto Zorio presented an untitled work that consisted of a large, shallow bowl filled with a blend of yellow powder, sulfur and metal slivers [fig. 13]. On the surface of the mixture rested a large magnet with a cylindrical handle, which, when moved by a viewer, would attract and pull the metal particles out of the mixture, leaving tracings of the substance on the surface. Though working in different mediums, the artists who participated in the Amalfi event demonstrated the vital energy of art being created in the lived moment.

"Arte povera + azione povera" also signaled a new direction for Arte Povera: it was now an international art form. One month after the exhibition, the Swiss curator and art historian Harold Szeemann and Celant met in Milan to discuss the Italian artists and the international art scene. The meeting led to the Arte Povera artists' inclusion in Szeemann's infamous exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" in Bern, Switzerland in 1969 and to Celant's first book on Arte Povera, *Art povera* (1969), printed in Italian, English and German. This publication

subsequently led to the first of many travels to New York and brought Celant further recognition in the New York art scene.[120]

In the January 1970 edition of *The New Yorker*, the art critic Harold Rosenberg reviewed Celant's *Art Povera*. According to Celant, Rosenberg's article was instrumental in spreading knowledge of Arte Povera activity in the United States and internationally.[121] Rosenberg's essay, "De-aestheticization," for his column "The Art World" offered readers a review of the recent trend within the international art scene of recognizing artists who were removing aesthetic qualities from their works of art and privileging the artist's process over the creation of a final art object (if one was produced at all). While Rosenberg first cites Robert Morris, Donald Judd and other American artists as examples of this development, he relies primarily on Celant's recent publication, *Art povera*, to explain the international character of process-oriented artworks, including land and conceptual artists working in Europe and America:

> …"Art *povera*" is a useful book, more adequate to its subject than art books generally. No art lends itself so readily to –in fact, at times depends so completely upon – publication than this art of actual materials and events. It might, as we are told, have taken two cranes, one loader, four transports, four cement trucks, and a sixty-eight ton mass of granite to carry out one of Heizer's boulder-moving enterprises in Nevada, yet the result is essentially art for the book – that is, for photographs with captions –since once the rock has come to rest visual interest in it depends on the cameraman's angle shots, his choice of distance, and the artist's explanation of his project….[122]

Rosenberg's positive reception in *The New Yorker* initiated Celant's recognition in the U.S. Soon he was receiving invitations to travel throughout the U.S. to offer lectures on the latest in international, contemporary artistic research.[123]

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[120] Celant, "A History among Stories," 23.
[121] Ibid., 19.
[122] Harold Rosenberg, "De-aestheticization," *The New Yorker*, January 24, 1970, 65.
[123] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 19th, 2013.

In his preface to *Art povera*, Celant emphasizes that, although the book is called *Art povera,* it "does not aspire to be a unique definition of [these] works of art" and that there are other equally relevant definitions being used internationally to describe the similar works, among them "conceptual art, earthworks, and anti-form."[124] In order to broaden "Arte Povera" to include an international range of artists, Celant emphasized the more contingent and organic elements of the artists' works they all shared. Once again Celant adjusted "Arte Povera" to fit the occasion, which now included American, German, Italian, Dutch, and British artists who were all working in a wide variety of materials and techniques. The omission of all but one French artist was intentional. Less polemical than the dialogue between Europe and America artists was the attempt on the part of European artists to secede from the once dominant authority of France's art scene, well established as the art world center prior to WWII.[125] The devastation of the European socio-cultural landscape after the war provided the opportunity for new nations to vie for the title of "art world capital." In the U.S. the critic Clement Greenberg claimed that the most advanced artistic research was occurring in New York by Abstract Expressionists whose works constituted "the first manifestation of American art to draw a standing protest at home as well as serious attention from Europe, where, though deplored more often than praised, they have already influenced an important part of the avant-garde."[126] While this narrative was promoted within America, in Europe it was being undermined by artists and critics such as Celant.

In this 1969 book Celant envisioned a new artistic role for the Arte Povera artist: the artist-alchemist. The role of the artist-alchemist is to search for the essence of things, to mingle in his environment and rediscover himself (his body, memory, and actions) within it, to live

[124] Germano Celant, *Art povera* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 6.
[125] Germano Celant, interviewed by the author, November 18th, 2013.
[126] Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 209.

within the moment, to abandon linguistic mediation and communicate directly, and to create artworks that do not represent nature, but "extend the realm of the sensible."[127] Celant's writing for this text was partially influenced by John Dewey's *Art as Experience*, which had been translated into Italian in 1951 and is quoted within his text. Celant also cites the composer John Cage: "art becomes a sort of experimental condition in which one experiments living"[128] and further explains that art-making is now a continuum with life. Celant's decision to describe these artists as "artists-alchemists" was his attempt at uniting a broad collection of artists[129] who were working in very divergent styles but who could be distinguished by their shared "alchemical" interests in offering viewers visceral experiences of the art object within a state of flux, an exploration of the mutability of materials, and a search for the underlying energies of life. These artists, he felt, had the power to reveal the wonders and mysteries of the everyday.

The metaphor of alchemy can be traced in the transformation of materials such as in Giovanni Anselmo's untitled work from 1968 illustrated in *Art povera* [fig. 14]. This work is composed of a rectangular block of granite less than two feet tall when set upright on the floor. Attached to it is a smaller block of granite tied by a thick metal wire. Between these two granite pieces is a head of fresh lettuce and, as the lettuce withers, the tension of the wire holding the granite pieces together loosens until the smaller block drops to a pile of sawdust on the floor beneath. The transformation of the lettuce over a period of time and the subsequent drop of the

[127] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 119.
[128] Ibid., 121.
[129]The artists included within *Art Povera* were: Carl Andre, Giovanni Anselmo, Robert Barry, Joseph Beuys, Alighiero Boetti, Marinus Boezem, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Walter de Maria, Jan Dibbets, Luciano Fabro, Barry Flanagan, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Eva Hesse, Douglas Huebler, Stephen Kaltenbach, Joseph Kosuth, Jannis Kounellis, Richard Long, Mario Merz, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Reiner Ruthenbeck, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier, Ger van Elk, Franz Erhard Walther, Lawrence Weiner, Gilberto Zorio, and the Zoo.

less mutable granite reveals the inherent tension and pull of gravity, an invisible power which is constantly affecting the present. Anselmo's text for the *Art povera* elaborates this point:

> I, the world, things, life – we are situations of energy. The point is not to crystallize such situations, but to keep them open and alive as a function of our life.
>
> Because a mode of action must correspond to every mode of thought or being, my works are true substantiations of the power of an action, of the energy, of a situation or an event, etc.; and not experiences of these things at the level of annotation or sign or still-life alone.
>
> The energy of a torsion, for instance, must live with its true force. It clearly could not live with its form alone.
>
> I think that to work in this direction, because energy exists beneath the most varied appearances and situations, one must enjoy absolute freedom of choice or use of materials. Therefore to speak of styles of form or antiform, therefore seems silly; at best this is a secondary and superficial problem.
>
> For me it is necessary to work in this way because I know of no other systems for getting to the heart of reality – which in my works, becomes an extension of my life, thought, and action.[130]

A similar line of research by an "artist-alchemist" is exemplified in Pier Paolo Calzolari's poetic work also represented in the catalogue. The search for madness, a continual questioning of "reality" and the embrace of metamorphosis are addressed in his *Il filtro* and *Benvenuto all'angelo*, an interactive installation located in the artist's studio and residence at the Palazzo Bentivolgio in 1966 [fig. 15]. For this work Calzolari invited visitors when they first arrived to remove their shoes and wear red socks. They would then walk through *Il Filtro,* an enclosed hallway with a soft rubber floor illuminated by ultra-violet light. At the end of the corridor participants would emerge from this narrow, dark hall and enter into a brightly light open expanse carpeted with fake green grass and filled with white doves flying through the space of *Benvenuto all'angelo*. As with many Arte Povera works, this installation can be read on many

[130] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 125.

levels, but is foremost a physically and mentally immersive experience for viewers within an artistic environment designed to provide a transformative experience.

In *Art povera* Celant references a second identity for the Arte Povera artist, "the nomad," an identity first mentioned by Celant in his *Arte povera* text for the 1968 de' Fosherari show. The concept of nomad is related to Celant's description of Arte Povera artists as "guerilla fighters" in that both are elusive wayfarers, and although "the nomad" lacks the same political connotation as "guerilla fighter," the nomad's defiance of norms makes him an anarchist:

> Today life, art, or politics find their highest degree of freedom in anarchy and in continuous behavioral nomadism. They are stimuli which cause one to verify one's degree of mental and physical existence continuously. They are the urgency of a presence that will eliminate the manipulation of life, to bring forward again the individuality of every human and natural action.[131]

The nomad's drive for freedom of human expression in the moment, seen in many of the works included in *Art povera*, is perhaps most clearly represented by Penone's untitled work from 1968 [fig. 16]. For this composition Penone created six works over a period of five days in the Maritime Alps in his native region of Garessio, near Turin. For each creation Penone worked with young trees to forge a connection between his life and the natural environment. His actions ranged from braiding three saplings together, so that their growth would always exemplify the energy Penone exerted on them, to wrapping his body around a tree and demarcating his outline with nails and metal wire, so that the tree's growth would always bear the mark of the artist's existence. Similarly, in a third action, Penone outlined his hand against a tree with nails. Then he attached twenty-two lead weights, the same number as his age, with the plan of adding one additional weight for every year of his life until his death. In his will he stipulated that a rod be placed in the tree to attract lightening and potentially melt all the weights. Penone has described

[131] Ibid., 123.

this living sculpture, the trees as: "… having lost and consumed all emotional, formal and cultural meaning, appears as a vital element in continuous expansion, proliferation and growth."[132]

The Arte Povera artists were also viewed by Celant as nomads who move through various cultural histories with attention to decline and failure.[133] As nomads, these artists reinvent themselves within each environment they enter, drawing upon the local for materials and adopting new languages while rejecting bounded conventions. In an interview published in the exhibition catalogue *Arte Povera: Art from Italy 1967-2002,* Celant elaborated upon this expanded definition of nomadism:

> The subjectivity invoked by European art and culture is the nomadic being, the one who refuses to yield to the stability and rigidity of the terms imposed. To become a subject and acquire a sense of one's own identity, one needn't have a role or boundary; one need only move about in life's energy field, without limits or directions. The same holds true for art, where the object becomes something 'lived', not only *cogito*. This theory of constant flow derives from an intellectual topography based on laws of decomposition and downfall, of ruin and history, which are not resigned to accepting invasion by 'new worlds', but rather seek to instill a morbid enthusiasm for weakness and tragedy…. [134]

The final Arte Povera show Celant curated during this phase of his career was held in 1970 at La Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Turin, the location of the Museo Sperimentale collection and an art institution that Celant has maintained ties with throughout his career. This exhibition, which Celant curated along with the director of the museum, Aldo Passolini, and Celant's friend and fellow art critic, Lucy Lippard, was entitled "Conceptual Art

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[132] Friedemann Malsch, Christiane Meyer-Stoll, and Valentina Pero, eds., *Che fare? Arte Povera – The Historic Years*, 228.
[133] Germano Celant, *The Knot: Arte Povera at P.S.1.* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi and Co., 1985), 7.
[134] Germano Celant, "Germano Celant vs. Arte Povera," in *Arte Povera: Art from Italy 1967-2002* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002), 23. This interview is a compilation of questions posed to Celant from 1986 to 2002 by Anna Costantini, Daniel Soutif and Marga Paz. Within the interview in *Arte Povera Art Povera* Celant describes himself as a nomad as well. According to Celant, Italian art historians and critics at the time were specialists in the entire span of Italian art history, yet lacked a global knowledge of art history. Celant believed that he had to become a nomad traversing international territories and not adhering to a proscribed practice in order to enlarge his perspective (Celant, 23).

Arte Povera Land Art." This show, which included the work of forty-three international artists, was Celant's largest curatorial effort at this point and captured his continued ambition to join international artists working in progressive art forms.[135] Many of the Americans shown in this exhibit were artists Celant had become acquainted with during his travels to the U.S. the previous year.

By 1971 Celant concluded that the term "Arte Povera" had served its purpose in establishing the contribution these artists had made to a larger international art scene and that it was no longer necessary to frame these artists as a group. He also felt that the term "left little room for other languages, such as music and dance, architecture and design…"[136] When the artists Celant identified as Arte Povera were invited to present their work at an exhibition in Munich that year, Celant tried to persuade them as well as the curators to no longer use the term. When they ignored his request, Celant wrote a short untitled diatribe against the art institutions in general and included Arte Povera among a list of artistic groups that had failed to overturn "the system." After abandoning the term, "Arte Povera," Celant turned his scholarship toward monographs on a broad range of international artists working in diverse mediums. The term "Arte Povera" continued to arise on occasion in discussions between artists associated with the term, however, as well as among art critics questioning them on their relationship to this "movement."

[135]Artists who were included in this show were: Giovanni Anselmo, Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, John Baldessari, Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Christo, Hanne Darboven, Walter De Maria, Jan Dibbets, Luciano Fabro, Dan Flavin, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Douglas Huebler, Stephen Kaltenbach, Yves Klein, On Kawara, Joseph Kosuth, Jannis Kounellis, Sol LeWitt, Piero Manzoni, Mario Merz, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Robert Ryman, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier, Bernard Venet, Lawrence Weiner, and Gilberto Zorio.
[136] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 25-26.

Nearly ten years after he rejected the term "Arte Povera," Celant decided to reinstate it for a series of exhibitions in the early 1980s. In previous Arte Povera exhibitions the artists who were invited to participate continually shifted. The fluctuating artistic conversations that were carried out between 1967 and 1971 among Celant and various artists mitigated against defining a group with established membership. Only in the 1980s, after the term had become historicized, was Celant able to reflect upon the artists whom he could now identify as core contributors to Arte Povera: Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini and Gilberto Zorio.

For this revival Celant once again elaborated upon his conception of Arte Povera in his 1985 catalogue and exhibition, "The Knot: Arte Povera at P.S.1," held in New York. This was perhaps Celant's most involved reading of Arte Povera to date. Celant's choice of the Gordian Knot as a metaphor for this exhibition was intended to address "a European art whose problems and invisible routes have not yet been disentangled or recognized – an enigma between past and present, between traditional and contemporary, which we can penetrate only by stepping in and reading in an irregular, fragmentary way."[137] In his prologue to the catalogue for "The Knot" Celant explains that the complexity of this movement is similar to this kind of knot. Arte Povera is comprised of numerous interwoven threads such as history, politics, philosophy, psychology, languages and materials, he writes. Because the knot can only be read in a disconnected manner, our interpretations and perspectives are continually being altered as we approach these artists' works from different angles. Underlying Celant's metaphor is the new historical, primarily Italian, context within which he now located Arte Povera. The emphasis he places on the

[137] Celant, *The Knot: Arte Povera at P.S.1.,* 2.

importance of the contexts from which these artists and their work emerged was tied to the critical practice Celant had developed in his numerous monographs written over the previous decade.

Celant's decision to reinstate "Arte Povera," now defined as a group of thirteen Italian artists, was in large part due to his belief in the need within the art world to recognize artists who could produce critical art that addressed contemporary social issues. The decision was also a response to the art market's support of Italian painters who returned to traditional painting techniques and embraced the role of the "genius artist." In particular, Celant focused his criticism upon the Italian art group, the Transavantgarde, which was promoted by the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva in the early 1980s. According to Celant the Transavantgarde artists such as Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente and Enzo Cucchi, who had returned to the traditional artistic practice of painting, were in fact producing decadent and self-gratifying works that, while offering allusions to each artist's rich artistic heritage, lacked any real content. [138]

Besides instigating a somewhat heated volley between Celant and Bonito Oliva, Celant's revisiting of the term "Arte Povera" stirred other reactions within the larger international art world in the 1980s. Whereas few questions arose over the relevancy of the term during the 1970s, Celant's unusual revival of the term inspired some contemporary scholars to debate its viability. For the most part, these scholars attempted to distinguish the activities of Arte Povera artists apart from Celant's generalization about the group, hoping to amplify the significance of individual achievements.[139] There was concern even by the artists themselves[140] that the term

[138] Ibid., 8. This critical debate between Celant and Bonito Oliva will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.
[139] In addition to the scholars mentioned within chapter two, there have been others who have also examined the history of Arte Povera. While this chapter focuses only on those scholars who have published critiques of the term "Arte Povera," there have been four dissertations that question the term's relevancy or seek to provide new

"Arte Povera" had diminished the distinctiveness of the careers of individual artists associated with the group. Still, such discussions could occur without addressing to some extent the fact that Celant's support and promotion played a significant role in the artists' success. In order to downplay Celant's role in creating and promoting Arte Povera, several recent scholars have chosen to emphasize that these artists launched their artistic careers before Celant placed them under his umbrella term, as well as the important roles these artists played in personally disseminating their own ideas on contemporary Italian art through the international art world. [141]

This new generation of critics to examine Arte Povera has been led by the American art historian Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who was until 2009 the Chief Curator at the Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art in Rivoli, Italy, which holds one of the largest collections of Arte Povera works. Christov-Bakargiev's most polemical writing in regard to Celant's relationship to Arte Povera is her first article published in 1987 in *Flash Art,* "Arte Povera 1967-1987." In this essay, Christov-Bakargiev criticizes Celant for focusing only on the material reductionism of Arte Povera artists' works, playing them against American Minimalism. She claims that Celant's ambition to create an Italian alternative to American Minimalism was no longer relevant and that the artists' works needed to be discussed within a larger international

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interpretations: Claire Gilman, "Arte Povera's Theater: Artifice and Anti-Modernism in Italian Art of the 1960s" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006); Dorian Ker, "Twelve Perspectives on Arte Povera," (PhD diss., University of Essex, 1998); Laura Petican, "Arte Povera and the Baroque: Building an International Identity," (PhD diss. Jacobs University Bremen, 2010); and Elizabeth Mangini, "Arte Povera in Turin, 1967-1978: Contextualizing Artistic Strategies During the Anni di Piombo," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2010). Three other scholars who have published on the larger socio-historic context that surrounded Arte Povera in the late 1960s, though not critiquing "Arte Povera" as a term are Robert Lumley, Nicholas Cullinan and Jacopo Galimberti.

[140] In various articles spanning from many years Jannis Kounellis, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Alighiero Boetti, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mario Merz and Gilberto Zorio all took issue with the term Arte Povera.

[141] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev in particular has emphasized in most of her writings on Arte Povera the importance of the fact that many of the individual artists had established careers before meeting Celant and that their travels abroad helped to create an international dialogue among artists. While scholars such as Christov-Bakargiev stress the importance of the artists having an active hand in promoting their work, it is often left unsaid that Celant never made any statements to contradict the importance of the individual artists' activities and in fact he often spoke highly of their endeavors to engage in international artistic dialogues.

context.[142] Christov-Bakargiev believes there was another key dimension to the works of these artists and she aligns their production from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s with the intertextuality and relativistic subjectivism being discussed by thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm. After laying forth her claim about "Arte Povera" and reviewing the historical context within which these artists were working (one that diminishes Celant's role), Christov-Bakargiev profiled each of the individual artists' careers and indicated how each of these artists create work that does not necessarily conform with Celant's account of "Arte Povera."[143]

In her following writings published during the 1990s and 2000s,[144] Christov-Bakargiev softened her views: she no longer directly confronted Celant's role and now firmly maintained the relevancy of the term "Arte Povera" and its uniquely Italian identity. Her main objective throughout her writings has been to locate the Arte Povera artists within a larger cultural-historical context, to demonstrate that Arte Povera became a successful artistic group through the effort of many individuals, and to clarify that these artists did in fact have full careers before and after they met Celant. In "Thrust Into the Whirlwind: Italian Art before Arte Povera," an essay written for the 2001 catalogue *Zero to Infinity*, for example, Christov-Bakargiev focuses on the years prior to the formation of Arte Povera and the cultural, economic and politic events that shaped the artists' careers. She notes that although the Arte Povera artists produced unique works, this production did not emerge spontaneously, but was influenced by the numerous

[142] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Arte Povera 1967-1987" *Flash Art*, no. 137 (Nov./Dec. 1987): 58.
[143] One downside of this article is that the scholar does not do justice to Celant's definition of "Arte Povera" by focusing only on portions of his early writings and finding only error in his interpretation of Arte Povera; Christov-Bakargiev remedies this oversight in her subsequent writings on the topic when she no longer dismisses Celant's contribution to the movement's formation entirely.
[144] Christov-Bakargiev's writings on Arte Povera include "Thrust Into the Whirlwind: Italian Art before Arte Povera" in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972*, "Arte Povera or the Space of Elements" in *Arte Povera from the Goetz Collection* and her 1999 survey *Arte Povera.*

postwar avant-garde artists and thinkers who preceded them, and gives special importance to the influence of the art critic Carla Lonzi in articulating this new form of art.[145]

Christov-Bakargiev's essay for a 1997 traveling exhibition in Germany, which exhibited Arte Povera works from the Goetz Collection, provides some of her most coherent summary definitions of what Arte Povera entails.[146] Perhaps the most comprehensive is in her conclusion, where she provides a loose definition of Arte Povera artistic activities:

> Arte Povera questioned the a-critical faith in science and progress of Modernity, rejecting avant-garde aesthetics dominant in the early sixties and shifted attention towards a cyclical view of culture and therefore to myth, origin, and tradition…. Complex cultural layering joined with a shift from cold, 'science'-determined environments to the domestic nature of the habitat, where real human communicative relations are at stake and not repetitive perceptive reactions…. [A] hybrid art, at once radically innovative in its stylistic variety and wholly open to past culture, always on the cutting edge between art and life, ordered and disordered, built and unbuilt, a metaphor for freedom, flexibility and complexity.[147]

In her 1999 survey, *Arte Povera*, Christov-Bakargiev offers a similar description of Arte Povera and further explains that the artists "attempted to create a subjective understanding of matter and space allowing for an experience of the 'primary' energy present in all aspects of life as lived directly and not mediated through representation, ideology or codified languages."[148] Christov-Bakargiev acknowledges in her survey that Celant's 1967 manifesto "created a framework for understanding Arte Povera as a movement,"[149] yet she points out that the artists themselves "rarely referred directly to political action in their works or writings."[150] Christov-

[145] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Thrust Into the Whirlwind: Italian Art before Arte Povera," in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera, 1962-1972* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), 21.
[146] In this, and other texts on Arte Povera, Christov-Bakargiev considers Celant's core group of thirteen artists as the key members of Arte Povera, but she also often mentions other artists working alongside the designated "Arte Povera" artists: Piero Gilardi, Mario Ceroli, Claudio Cintoli, Gianni Piacentino, Luca Patella, Paolo Icaro, Eliseo Mattiacci, Hidetoshi Nagasawa, and Aldo Mondino.
[147] Christov-Bakargiev, "Arte Povera or the Space of Elements," 21.
[148] Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, 17.
[149] Ibid., 29.
[150] Ibid., 33.

Bakargiev's final conclusion in her survey on Arte Povera is that while Arte Povera does share many commonalities with other international artists and movements during the late 1960s, there are in fact distinctive attributes in their work that unites these artists, among them:

> …a reference to domesticity, community and habitat; a human scale; a layering of diverse cultural references; a rejection of coherent style, unitary authorship, the distinctions between literal and metaphoric, natural and artificial, through the transformation of the installation into a 'poor theatre' where culture and nature coincide.[151]

Christov-Bakargiev's vacillation in critiquing the term "Arte Povera" was in the end not based on a denial that there is a certain unity in the group of artists known as Arte Povera, but that the term itself was coined by someone external to the art making at a time when other relevant terms were being developed to characterize related artistic strategies.[152] Also seeking to place distance between Celant and the artists, scholars of Arte Povera such as Dan Cameron, Luigi Menghelli, Bettina Ruhrberg, and Giovanni Lista, have been critical of Celant's personal involvement with the artists, suggesting that what is a key component of his critical practice is merely the aim of an opportunist.

Shortly following Christov-Bakargiev's reproachful 1987 essay on Celant and Arte Povera, Dan Cameron, a New York-based art critic, offered his opinion on the relevancy of the term "Arte Povera" in his 1992 article, "Anxieties of Influence: Regionalism, Arte Povera and the Cold War," also published in *Flash Art.* Taking Christov-Bakargiev's critical stance against Celant's formation of the group as his point of departure, Cameron furthers her argument with his claim that what these artists were exploring within their practices was not unique to the

[151] Ibid, 46.

[152] In "Arte Povera or the Space of Elements" Christov-Bakargiev writes, "Because Arte Povera was coined by a critic and not by the artists themselves, and because in the late sixties terms such as process art, antiform, conceptual art, arte povera were not as clear-cut definitions as they are today, and were even terms in competition used to describe whole generations of post-minimal art in Europe and America, the question has been raised as to whether it is even appropriate to define *arte povera* as a movement at all." (21)

Italian art scene, but was in fact part of a larger international tendency that had a consistent set of stylistic practices that spanned various countries around the world.[153]

Like Christov-Bakargiev, Cameron criticizes Celant's anti-American stance in his late 1960s writings and goes even further to identify this tone in Celant's 1980s writings as well. Cameron states that Celant's rhetoric is meant less to identify the artistic practices of Arte Povera and has more to do with establishing and defining a new art movement's ideology in opposition to other movements at the time.[154] Though Cameron claims that it is necessary to no longer discuss American and European art practices in dichotic terms, in his attempt to demonstrate the international nature of the artists' shared practices he continues to place the Americans as leaders of this artistic research. In his attempt to rewrite Arte Povera's historical narrative, Cameron argues that the Arte Povera artists did not spring "fully formed from the hills of Turin, the cafes of Rome, and/or the ambition of Celant."[155] Instead he points to Robert Rauschenberg's solo exhibitions in Italy during the 1950s and early 1960s as well as Jim Dine and Richard Serra's shows in Italy during the early 1960s as influential events in the development of Arte Povera.[156] Though Cameron does accurately identify many international artists who shared similar artistic research interests, he does not acknowledge that "Arte Povera" was never meant to signal a movement with a clear stylistic definition and therefore misconstrues Celant's intentions with the creation of the term. As Celant explained in a 1985 interview, "Because it made a point of relating to its context, attempting to internalize it dialectically, Arte povera was a tension more

[153] Dan Cameron, "Anxieties of Influence: Regionalism, Arte Povera, and the Cold War," *Flash Art*, no. 164 (1992): 75.
[154] Ibid., 77-78.
[155] Cameron, 78.
[156] Cameron does not address the artistic influences these American artists may have been absorbing from the current Italian artistic research being conducted at the time by artists such as Lucio Fontana and Alberto Burri.

than a system…. Rather than a definition, Arte povera was and is a way of being and of considering oneself that changes like the weather."[157]

But for Cameron, the crucial question is: would Arte Povera have had the same historical presence and force without Celant's promotion? While giving Celant credit for launching the careers of the Italian Arte Povera artists, Cameron identifies what he perceives to be the central issue surrounding the formation of the group, Celant's intention and motivation in formulating "Arte Povera." Cameron claims that Celant "articulated the idea of Arte Povera primarily as a vehicle for himself, with the artists serving largely as accessories until the time when they were no longer of any use to the 'movement.'"[158] Furthermore, Cameron argues that Celant's 1971 dissolution of the group occurred not for the reasons Celant claimed – the institutionalization of the term – but because by 1971 Celant had established himself as a leading international art critic and no longer needed Arte Povera. Cameron argues that the Italian artists identified by this term should instead be classified within a larger context of international artistic practice. The fact that Celant decided to bring the term "Arte Povera" back "when it suited him"[159] in the 1980s only further affirms in Cameron's mind that Celant's primary goal was to use these artists to enhance his own career, and that his personal agenda is responsible for so much confusion about the meaning of the term. Cameron questions why Celant "did not take his own call for greater freedom in art more seriously, in terms of avoiding the temptation to yoke his artists with the problem of a group identity."[160] The term "Arte Povera" is no longer relevant, he continues: "[u]nless there are special characteristics in these artists' late sixties works that are so outstandingly Italian they outweigh the general tendency of time to move in this direction, it

[157] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 21.
[158] Cameron, 78.
[159] Ibid., 81.
[160] Ibid.

might be prudent to strike the name 'Arte Povera' from the vocabulary of historical movements as being more misleading than it is informative."[161] Cameron suggests that the best solution would be to acknowledge that the work of Arte Povera artists was not stylistically unique to Italy and therefore we should no longer continue using the term Arte Provera to distinguish them.[162]

The same year Cameron published his article (1992), the Italian art critic and curator Luigi Meneghelli organized an exhibition of Arte Povera works at the Kodama Gallery in Osaka, Japan. For the catalogue Meneghelli wrote a brief introductory overview of the now-firmly established group of Italian artists in addition to summaries of each Arte Povera artist's individual career. Like Christov-Bakargiev and Cameron, Meneghelli raised his concerns about how Arte Povera can best be understood, either as a movement or as a broader, less defined field of artistic activity: should Arte Povera be considered a strictly Italian movement or part of larger international art scene? Is Arte Povera a descendent of the nihilistic, historical avant-garde, a Dadaistic revolt, or a new avant-garde pursuing a positive form of artistic research?[163] Meneghelli's opening statement asks the reader if it is valid to be exhibiting Arte Povera as a group twenty-five years after the concept was invented by Celant, considering what could be interpreted as "another attempt [by Celant] to historicize (and to close inside a definition) something which has many souls and emotions."[164] It is likely that Meneghelli was referring to Celant's curatorial return to Arte Povera in the 1980s here and in particular his statement in a 1985 interview published in *Arte Povera Art Povera*, in which Celant says that he believed Arte Povera was now historicized but that it "was able to function once again as a 'conflict' against

[161] Ibid.
[162] Cameron, 81.
[163] Luigi Meneghelli, *Arte Povera* (Osaka: Kodoma Gallery, 1992), 8.
[164] Meneghelli, *Arte Povera*, 8.

art's return to order with painting."[165] Meneghelli argues in his gallery catalogue, while never actually questioning Celant's use of the term Arte Povera, that instead of attempting to once again define Arte Povera, it would be more pro-active to explore the open practice of Arte Povera artists and their ability to expand its artistic research beyond any definite parameters.[166]

Meneghelli's basic understanding of the term "Arte Povera," nevertheless, does not differ from Celant's 1967 account of the term. His essay assesses the strategies and advancements made by Arte Povera artists during their formative years in the late 1960s, just as Celant had done at the time. Meneghelli touches upon Arte Povera artists' rejection of stylistic and material coherency, their attempt to avoid artistic identification with finalized artistic objects by allowing the works of art to remain mutable and open to interpretation, and the relocation of the art objects off the pedestal and wall mountings in order to integrate them into the lived environment. Meneghelli affirms that "Arte Povera" refers to an artistic language:

> …based on stripping away, on making signs 'poorer' until they are 'reduced to their archetypes'…. These works were not all made in order to be read for a meaning or for a group of symbols but simply in order to suggest that art space and living space are not all that distant from each other. What was of interest was a work which avoids formal or directional intentions and which presents itself, instead, as a continuous flux between the inside and the outside of things, as a 'confirmation of absence, of rejection, of subject and object': the sculptures are usable: they are both scenery and auditorium and the space is a pure 'field of sensibility.'[167]

In addition to establishing the broad parameters of Arte Povera activity in terms Celant initiated in the 1960s and 1970s, Meneghelli's essay provides a brief overview of Arte Povera exhibitions, beginning with initial shows of artists now associated with Arte Povera held in 1967 by critics other than Celant, and continuing with a list of influential international artist shows

[165] Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, 26.
[166] Meneghelli, 8
[167] Ibid., 9.

held in 1969 ("When Attitudes Become Form" in Bern, "Op Losse Schroeven" in Amsterdam, "Processes of Visualized Thought" in Lucerne) that incorporated many of the Arte Povera artists within larger international group exhibitions.

Like Christov-Bakargiev in her numerous essays, Meneghelli emphasizes the importance of exhibitions held in Rome and Turin in 1967 (Calvesi and Boatto's "Fuoco, imagine, acqua, terra" and Daniela Palazzoli's "Con temp l'azione") in addition to Celant's curatorial endeavors. Both exhibitions helped establish new artistic practices and techniques such as direct, artistic language and the use of raw, un-manipulated materials being put into action. Meneghelli astutely summarizes what he calls the "cardinal concepts" of Celant's concept of Arte Povera:

> Above all a linguistic process that tends to subtract, to reduce to minimum terms all the signs employed. Creation (in the classical sense of transforming material into an aesthetic object) was rejected: 'primary' material was to be presented with manipulation or change, at the most it was left free to alter as a result of its particular physical or chemical make-up. Reference to this primary aspect is not just of referring to something natural (animal, vegetable or mineral) but also to insignificant, banal, everyday things, to 'poor' technological apparata (like neon lights, electrical resistance)which can assist on journies [sic] to the origins of energy, to the roots of vital flux. There was a search for the magical, archetypal nucleus of things, their being and their existence: briefly, their pure presence, in such a way as to avoid any risk of mimetic representation or of adding to what there was already.[168]

Meneghelli draws into his discussion of the art critic's early writings on Arte Povera the question of Celant's personal motivation for creation of this term. Meneghelli references Cameron's severe criticism of Celant's intentions in his article and his suggestion that Arte Povera "was simply a regional expression of an international tendency."[169] Meneghelli suggests that the issue of who influenced whom during a period of dynamic global exchange is not as relevant as looking at the national-cultural roots that fostered unique variations within artistic advancements. For Arte Povera these roots could be the Futurists, Piero Manzoni, Lucio Fontana

[168] Ibid., 10.
[169] Ibid., 12.

and Pier Paolo Pasolini, among others.[170] Meneghelli concludes his preface with an astute remark on the nature of "Arte Povera" that correlates with Celant's own statements:

> It [Arte Povera] was and is a plural genre: a constant questioning which does not pose problems but which poses itself as a problem. It is intransitive, unfollowable. It eclipses itself, they say. It is an axe-blow, a contortion, a light suddenly lit without warning. It is a way of seeing the same things with different eyes. It is a fact of Zen.[171]

Meneghelli's 1992 Arte Povera exhibition was just one of many international shows meant to re-focus attention on this group of artists during the 1990s. Published in the same 1997 exhibition catalogue as Christov-Bakargiev's "Arte Povera or the Space of Elements" is a critical essay by Bettina Ruhrberg, "Arte Povera. The Genesis of a Term and the Reception of a 'Movement'." Ruhrberg refers to Celant as the "chief ideologist of Arte Povera" [172] and finds strong similarities between the career of Celant and Pierre Restany, the French art critic who organized the Nouveaux Réalistes group in 1960. Both Restany and Celant were art critics wary of America's hegemonic control of the international art scene and interested in reestablishing Europe's leadership of the art world. Yet, as she notes, Restany's formation of the Nouveau Réalistes differed from Celant's formation of Arte Povera in that Restany's manifesto was somewhat more definitive in its explanation of the type of art being made by the group of artists. Ruhrberg acknowledges this difference, though in a somewhat despairing manner, when she states: "Germano Celant's personal involvement and his lack of distance to the artists and their works goes some way to explaining the fact that initially the innovative aspects of the phenomenon 'Arte Povera' were only ever described in rather general, blurred terms."[173]

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[170] Ibid., 12.
[171] Ibid., 14.
[172] Bettina Ruhrberg, "Arte Povera. The Genesis of a Term and the Reception of a 'Movement'," in *Arte Povera from the Goetz Collection* (Munich: Sammlung Goetz, 1997), 22.
[173] Ibid.

In her essay, Ruhrberg tracks Celant's "blurred terms" as he "adjusted his own theoretical superstructure several times" and addresses the reception of his writing by his peers.[174] Ruhrberg does acknowledge, however, that Celant's writing style was indicative of a period in which artists and writers were attempting to avoid rigid delineations and to create "open works."[175] Ruhrberg begins her account with Celant's 1967 exhibition of Arte Povera at the Galleria La Bertesca and works her way through his Arte Povera essays written up to 1970. While for the most part Ruhrberg astutely summarizes each transitional phase of Celant's writings, she also finds points of inconsistency within his texts. For example, Ruhrberg notes that in Celant's earliest essay for the Bertesca show, Celant did not stress the material "poverty" of their work and that in fact the artists at this exhibition were actually working with materials that were "meaningful in terms of their substance and innate symbolism."[176] For Celant's 1967 manifesto, in which he turned Arte Povera in a political direction, Ruhrberg finds the art critic's jargon irrelevant to the all the artists' working practices listed within the manifesto except for those of Jannis Kounellis.[177]

As Ruhrberg continues her critique of Celant's writings, she argues that the fault with his 1968 de' Fosherari text was that once again Celant's explanation, laden with political rhetoric, failed to identify the "level of intellectual and historical reflection in the works on show."[178] Ruhrberg concludes her systematic summation of Celant's texts by noting how many of the artists "would rather not be labeled as Arte Povera. Since the mid-1970s at the latest their work

[174] Ibid. Ruhrberg also briefly discusses the cultural climate in which Arte Povera was formed.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., 25.
[177] Christov-Bakargiev, "Arte Povera 1967-1987," 61. Christov-Bakargiev's early identification of "true blue" Arte Povera artists as being only Mario Merz and Gilberto Zorio demonstrates both these scholars rigidly apply the term "Arte Povera" to these artists with the assumption that this term was meant to define a stylistic movement.
[178] Ibid., 27.

has taken a variety of directions, and they have had less and less in common."[179] She gives Celant credit for recognizing an artistic trend occurring in Italy and promoting it to the larger art world, though she does not go so far as to say the term accurately applied to the artists' practices. According to Ruhrberg if the term is to be used, it must only be applied to the period of artistic practice occurring from 1969 to 1971 when the dialogue among the artists first fostered collective thinking. Though Ruhrberg grants that Celant's intention with this term was never to define an art movement, in the end, she joined Christov-Bakargiev, Cameron and others in faulting Celant for submerging the individual artists' diverse practices and attitudes under his shifting theoretical generalizations. [180]

A more recent publication on Arte Povera that also aims to broaden the understanding of the term is Giovanni Lista's 2006 text, *Arte Povera*. Lista is an Italian art historian and critic who has written extensively on Futurism. Like Christov-Bakargiev, Lista's main contribution to scholarship on Arte Povera has been to deepen the understanding of the cultural context within which these artists emerged and flourished. Lista's survey is an attempt to provide a new and unique interpretation of Arte Povera as a group of artists working in a Franciscan-based aesthetic.[181] As did Ruhrberg, Lista tracks the thematic changes in Celant's writings for each of the group shows and the shifts in his definition of Arte Povera. He critically describes Celant's endeavors and attempts to diminish his role in defining the group. For example, when emphasizing in his discussion of the 1968 Amalfi exhibition what he perceives to be a link

[179] Ibid., 30.
[180] Ibid., 30-31.
[181] Lista perceives a connection between Arte Povera and Franciscan culture in their shared rejection of "superfluous sophistication" and artifice and their embrace of simplicity and poverty in their actions and work. Lista also sees an affinity both in Arte Povera's and the Franciscan's use of imagery to offer a direct and tangible experience of an abstract concept. Giovanni Lista, *Arte Povera* (Milan: Continents Editions srl, 2006), 28-29.

between Arte Povera and a Franciscan aesthetic, [182] Lista omits any mention of Celant's contribution to the exhibition's activities. Instead he steers his interpretation of the artists' endeavors back to a Franciscan ethical and aesthetic commitment by aligning their ideology with that of medieval scholars such as Saint Benedict, Isidore of Seville or Cassiodorus.[183] Lista writes:

> At Amalfi, with the simplicity of an approach consisting of a playful, bodily relationship with the world, the Arte Povera group displayed its close affinity with the Franciscan spirit. Saint Francis evokes the concrete objects of man in his totality, the enchantment of the tangible world, poverty experienced as a form of serenity. Arte Povera does not strive to emulate Franciscan primitivism, which would imply a regression based on an idealized, nostalgic view of the medieval world. Instead it claims the rebirth of a force of rebellion through a measured yet ostentatious gesture. It makes the ethical choice of voluntary poverty, its morality is a reversal of values. Voluntary poverty first of all means discipline. Poverist artists shun monumental or sophisticated solutions, sticking to the sheer necessary technicality. They recover the form and the force of craftsmanship and revive simple gestures in order to express a process of energy, materialize an intuition, wholly embody a vision of mind and spirit.[184]

Lista's survey also covers the main points of the group's formation and also adds some more nuanced details often omitted from the writings on Arte Povera's history, such as Arte Povera artist Giulio Paolini's role as the first to analyze Jerzy Grotowski's manifesto on "poor theater" and also Paolini being the first to use the term "povero" to describe his approach to art-making.[185] According to Lista the use of the term "Arte Povera" for the artists' first group exhibition, "Arte Povera e Im-Spazio" at the Galleria La Bertesca in Genoa in October 1967, was a slapdash effort on Germano Celant's part.[186] Furthermore, Lista argues that Celant did not have a firm grasp of what "*povero*" actually entailed. According to Lista, Celant "concentrated on

[182] For example when Lista discusses the 1968 Arte Povera show in Amalfi he gives credit only to the financial backer of the event and does not mention that Celant was the curator: "Arte Povera's utopia was given an ephemeral materialization thanks alone to Marcello Rumma, a young patron and collector who organized exhibitions at Amalfi promoting the most meaningful trends of contemporary research" (Lista, 26).
[183] Lista, 26.
[184] Ibid., 28.
[185] Ibid., 18.
[186] Lista dismisses Celant's first use of the term "Arte Povera" because he says Celant added it to the show at the last minute.

highlighting reality in the sense that [the exhibition's] idea of poverty meant stripping down to essentials and impersonality as practiced by Minimalist artists."[187] Lista contends that Paolini's discussion of the concept of "*povero"* in a 1967 interview with Carla Lonzi is the more accurate understanding of "impoverishing" theorized by Italian artists in the mid-1960s.[188] Paraphrasing the artist, Lista wrote that Paolini "believed the artist should instead endeavor to express himself by 'a modest way of working,' and even by 'a model built with humility,' so as not to materialize but to suggest a mental or physical space bound to life."[189]

This nuanced interpretation of *povero* enables Lista to take a step further toward what he considers the true essence of Arte Povera. Lista argues that Paolini's decision (and the similar decision made by other Arte Povera artists) to resist technological and industrial progress and the art market could be seen as parallel to Saint Francis' renouncing of his father's wealth for a life of poverty. [190] To further strengthen his assertion that Arte Povera was rooted in the values of Saint Francis, Lista shifts Grotowski's use of the term "poor" by aligning the director's affirmative interest in stripping the theater down to its essential structure in order to discover "the great riches inherent to the artistic form itself" with the positive connotations the term "poor" has in Italian culture.[191] Lista claims that it was, in fact, Grotowski's Italian assistant Eugenio Barba, a student of religious literature and history, who had encouraged the Polish theater director to use the term "poor" instead of "ascetic" when Grotowski wrote his "poor

[187] Lista, 20.
[188] Ibid., 18. By emphasizing Paolini's use of the term "*povero*" in an interview that occurred prior to the Bertesca exhibition, Lista was apparently attempting to diminish the innovation of Celant's coinage.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., 17. In his manifesto Grotowski wrote: "By accepting poverty in the theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, we discovered not only the theatre's intrinsic nature but as well the great riches inherent to the artistic form itself."

theater" manifesto.[192] Lista was also dismissive of Celant's later definitions of Arte Povera. Lista argues that Celant's "guerrilla" characterization, for example, "was an ideological over-qualification with respect to the formal beauty and serenity, at once metaphysical and Franciscan, of Arte Povera works."[193]

As a leading scholar on Futurism, Lista also attempts in his text to align Arte Povera artists with this early-twentieth century modern art movement. Lista relates the Futurist's investigations of energy and space and their embrace of stylistic incoherence to the later artists' works. Luciano Fabro, for example, explores the viewer's sensual and conceptual experience of space within such works as *In cubo* (*In Cube*, 1966) [fig. 17] where the viewer enters into a box built to the perimeters of the human body in order to experience his or her relationship to this enclosure. Pino Pascali created works such as *Missile Colomba della Pace* (*Dove of Peace Missile*, 1965) [fig. 18], drawing upon "the Futurist idea of 'huge toys' teaching 'physical courage, struggle, and warfare'…."[194] Giovanni Anselmo shows a Futurist preoccupation with invisible energy in such works such as *Piccola torsion* (*Small Torsion*, 1968) [fig. 19], in which the artist tightly twisted a piece of leather partially wrapped around a wood pole. The lower part of the leather is fixed within a block of cement and the artist halted the release of its wound-up energy by lodging the pole against the wall and leaving the work in a perpetual state of tension.

Although there are shared preoccupations among Arte Povera artists and the Futurists, Lista perceives Arte Povera as a dialectical response to the Futurist ideology.[195] Whereas the Futurists called for a break with the past, Arte Povera artists embrace their cultural legacy. The

[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid., 22.
[194] Ibid., 14.
[195] Ibid., 40.

Futurists celebrated a "continuous dynamism of a forward thrust towards progress,"[196] while Arte Povera artists examine the unperceived, and often very slow, energy that runs through all aspects of life.[197]

While Lista and many other scholars and critics have made significant contributions to assessing the achievements of Arte Povera artists, they have not diminished the important role Celant played during the artistic events that unfolded around the term "Arte Povera." As can be seen in the numerous publications on "Arte Povera," the term still functions to highlight a certain range of artistic activities and events that might have otherwise been obscured by the rapidly occurring activities of the contemporary art world.[198] "Arte Povera" is a term that was never meant to be strictly defined. Celant's intention was to ascertain the directions in which a new form of art-making was heading and to signal an entire shift in thinking about artistic production and practice. With each essay Celant expanded his analysis of the activities of the artists and offered a revised explanation of Arte Povera. Recognizing the contingent nature of this production whose meaning was entwined with the viewer's reception, Celant interpreted Arte Povera works through his own subjective experience of the moment. His perception of these works shifted over time as they were located in new environments, observed within new socio-critical contexts and appreciated anew through fresh understandings and experiences. Utilizing a "perverse" viewpoint, Celant embraced the multifarious interpretations and experiences the Arte Povera works offered. Here U.S. art critic and feminist Lucy Lippard's explanation of the role of

[196] Ibid.
[197] More so than Celant and Christov-Bakargiev, Lista's scholarship on the Arte Povera's genealogy is Italio-centric, which is most likely due to the art historian's overarching interest in establishing the group's roots in Futurism and Franciscan culture.
[198] The success of Celant's endeavors to promote these artists, whose practices still remain radical in the twenty-first century, is also evident in the continual Arte Povera exhibitions held internationally and which will be discussed in later chapters.

the contemporary art critic in "Change and Criticism" recognizes and allows for an art critic's approach such as Celant's with Arte Povera:

> The art scene itself is an endless self-corrective process; its workings are more evident the more it accelerates and condenses….
>
> A style or so-called movement emerges, crystallizes, splits into several direction over this period. As it does, the critic too finds himself divided. At the beginning of the 'trend,' similarities are stressed. The critic's job is to document the emergence of a common sensibility or style. As the style becomes more widespread and visible, the *differences* between the works and intentions become more important. It is not unusual to have to revise or contradict oneself on points one knows to have been correct when written but which have since become elementary, irrelevant, or even inaccurate.[199]

Celant's various writings on Arte Povera opened the critic to censure by fellow scholars hoping to tackle the central issue associated with the group: the relevancy of the term "Arte Povera" to accurately describe these artists' works. Attempting to locate artists within a group taxonomy has been a problematic issue throughout art history. In the case of Arte Povera the term has become synonymous with Celant's name, and his close collaboration with the artists is reflected in his critical interpretations of their work. It is almost impossible, therefore, to separate debates about the validity of the term "Art Povera" from the achievements and personality of Germano Celant. Christov-Bakargiev, Meneghelli, Ruhrberg, Cameron, and Lista all raised the question of the appropriateness of Celant's term and his attempts to illustrate in his writings the fast-paced, multi-headed artistic scene. Yet when critiquing Celant's characterizations of Arte Povera, these scholars focus primarily on the art critic's early 1960s writings on the group and did not fully explore Celant's later 1980s writings that further expanded and enriched the term "Arte Povera." A focused discussion of the cultural-historical context of the 1980s art world, the

[199] Lucy Lippard, "Change and Criticism: Consistency and Small Minds," in *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1971), 27.

activities of Arte Povera artists, and the intentions of Celant's writings at the time in regard to these artists will be explored and discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

ARTE POVERA'S REEMERGENCE AND THE 1980s RETURN TO PAINTING

In 1971, with interests in exploring new avenues of artistic research, Celant wrote his final essay of the decade on Arte Povera[200] and turned his attention to the work of individual artists. One of his first monographs was devoted to Giulio Paolini, a text Celant considered his first serious, in-depth study of a contemporary artist.[201] This work marked Celant's methodological shift from his earlier short essays on Arte Povera, where the rhetoric mirrored the spontaneous and volatile nature of the artists' works. His Paolini text shifted towards a more "systematic interpretation of data and histories, with iconographic and iconological analyses documented and verified with the aid of brief critiques in which the artist's career was considered in its complex historical context."[202] This publication was followed with monographs on artists such as Piero Manzoni (1972), Louise Nevelson (1973) and Mario Merz (1979). As Celant expanded his scholarly focus beyond Arte Povera in the 1970s, he also began to travel more frequently to the United States. Through Harold Rosenberg's 1969 *New Yorker* article on Celant's book *Art Povera,* Celant received broader recognition within the U.S. and journeyed for the first time to California to give seminars on contemporary art practices.[203] During his travels throughout the U.S. over the course of the decade, Celant forged new connections with numerous scholars, curators and artists, and undertook many provocative projects that recognized ground-breaking advancements being carried out by a variety of artists.

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[200] Germano Celant, "Senza titolo," *Domus,* no. 496 (March, 1971): 47-50.
[201] Germano Celant, "A Shadow Book," in *Giulio Paolini: 1960-1972* (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2003): n.p.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18, 2013. Celant was invited initially to California by the artist, feminist and academic Wanda Westcoast, who was a founder of Womanspace in Los Angeles in 1973, a gallery space and journal devoted to feminism and the arts.

As Celant focused his attention on projects such as *Book as artwork, 1960-72* (1972), *Precronistoria 1966-69* (1976)[204] and *Record as artwork, 1959-73* (1977), global socio-political trends were shifting the terrain of the art market. In 1981 these shifts inevitably brought Celant back as a champion of Arte Povera because of his concern that many contemporary artistic practices in the art world's limelight were failing to produce relevant, critical art that spoke to current social issues. Celant's decision to return to Arte Povera in the 1980s has received little scholarly attention and has often been dismissed as an attempt by Celant and the artists to compete for commercial success within a fluctuating art market. This superficial critique overlooks more fundamental interests of both Celant and the artists. The artists were in fact responding critically to the state of the art world and it seemed imperative for Celant to defend their work as well as distinguish the subtleties of their approach. During this period Celant's essays on Arte Povera artists identified, as they had in the past, nuanced shifts and new avenues of inquiry explored by the artists. In these essays Celant acknowledged many qualities of Arte Povera works of the period later recognized by scholars later in the 1990s and twenty-first century.

Paramount in Celant's return to Arte Povera was a response to pointed attacks directed at Arte Povera at this time by the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, a supporter of a group of five young Italian painters he referred to as the "Transavantgarde." The critical parley between Bonito Oliva and Celant carried out in numerous journal essays and exhibition catalogues spanning the 1980s was part of a larger debate among art historians, critics, curators and gallery

[204] Celant began writing this book in Turin in August of 1971; it is a collection of essays, publications and statements that Celant views as important to the development of various independent movements, theoretical attitudes and linguistic definitions. Interspersed between primary documents, Celant chronicles important exhibitions and the curators, artists and works which comprised them. He chose the period of 1966 to 1969 because these years marked the beginning of Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, Land Art, Arte Povera, Body Art, Environmental Art, Systemic Painting, and new media, hence the title *Precronistoria* or "pre-history."

owners operating in the Western art world who came to be roughly divided into two camps: those sympathetic to a return to traditional art forms and expressions of the artist's subjective condition, and those resisting the artist's return to conventional modes of creation that satisfied the demands of the art market. Celant, a fervent proponent of artistic practices that questioned established norms, the art market, and the function of contemporary art, became a leading voice in controversies that centered on the painterly work widely referred to as "Neo-Expressionism." At stake for Celant during this time was not only defending the work of Arte Povera, but also calling into question what he regarded as the conservative trajectory of the art world. This pivotal moment in Celant's career would have repercussions for his later projects and must be situated within a conversation among artists and critics that was carried out on a global scale during a tumultuous period of socio-economic change.

Fueling consumption of the latest artistic products on the market, a newly expanded media world of international art journals, along with the rapid dissemination of information via cable and satellite communication in the 1980s, provided consumers with an expanded access to the latest artistic productions. [205] This immense media attention turned in particular toward emerging young painters associated with the label "Neo-Expressionism," an umbrella term often used at the time by art critics and scholars attempting to identify a traditional approach to painting occurring globally.[206]

[205] Germano Celant, "A History among Stories," in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan: Electra, 2011), 23.
[206] "Neo-Expressionism" is no longer used today for its inefficiency to fully address the diversity of painterly practices occurring in the 1980s. For continuity, "Neo-Expressionism" will be used within this chapter in the same manner that other scholars at the time used it, that is, as a general catch-all for the diverse work by expressionistic painters of the 1980s. German Neo-Expressionism, however, continues to be a relevant term for a group of artists working in Germany who were responding to the legacy of early twentieth-century German Expressionism. For a discussion of later 20th-century German Neo-Expressionism see: Karen Lang, "Expressionism and the Two Germanys" in *Art of the Two Germanys/Cold War Culture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2009).

Broadly, what these diverse "Neo-Expressionist" painters shared was a return to painterly, subjectivist painting, figuration, symbolism and allusion to narrative. Enthusiastically embracing this return to painting, many critics and curators believed that what the art world lacked during the previous twenty years of art-making was artistic production that spoke to inner realms of existence, personal emotional experience, and individual memories – creative approaches associated with early twentieth-century expressionism. There was a consensus among many dealers and collectors that, after a long hiatus from painting within the avant-garde, this new generation of artists had reinvigorated traditional painting and were able to address contemporary experience. Reviewing a New York exhibition of these new paintings entitled "The Pressure to Paint" held at the Marlborough Gallery in 1982, for example, critic Kay Larson noted that, "[a]rtists are desperate to reconnect with feeling… [t]here is a compulsion to *make contact* – whether with materials, or with the heroic possibilities of painting, or with the myth of the artist-creator, dormant during twenty-odd years of irony and intellectual distance in art."[207]

With fervor equal to that of the advocates for a return to painting were critics across America and Western Europe who felt that the art world's renewed interest in painting was symptomatic of a neo-conservative trend occurring globally. As the American art historian and critic Douglas Crimp maintained, this new painting was "in direct opposition to the art of the sixties and seventies… which sought to contest the myths of high art, to declare art, like all other forms of endeavor, to be contingent upon the real, historical world."[208] More fundamentally, Crimp rejected the Modernist ideology of humanism, which casts the heroic individual as its

[207] Kay Larson, "Art: Pressure Points," *New York* (June 28, 1982): 59.
[208] Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October* 16 (Spring, 1981): 75.

leader. For Crimp, a rejection of traditional painting and the romantic model of the lone genius was a critique of the bourgeois ideology of the neo-conservative Reagan Era.[209]

Crimp's peer, the American art historian and critic Craig Owens, maintained that a driving force in this return to painting was desire on the part of affluent collectors for a new category of objects to buy. Painting was fashionable again, and painters were allowing their artistic practices to be swayed by the prospect of monetary wealth.[210] Owens claimed that what was at stake in this reprise of conventional mediums and practices was the transformation of the artist from a critical, political voice within society to a producer of commodities that attended only to his or her personal visions.[211] The embrace of a personal, private vision that proponents of the new painting saw as rejuvenating after a period of intellectualized production was, according to Owens, indicative of the artists' alienation from society and his or her retreat from the larger socio-political issues he or she felt powerless to change.[212] These artists, in his view, were responding to a moment in history when the modern concept of the cohesive individual subject was being exposed as a fragmented identity manipulated by external power structures.

Regardless of their monetary success and celebratory status, supporters of the return to painting argued that what was important about this new form of painting was that it was capable of expressing conditions of contemporary human existence. One of the most adamant defenders of Neo-Expressionist painting was the American art critic Donald Kuspit who, responding directly in his writings to critics such as Owens and Crimp, argued that this new painting did have a critical, vanguard character. These artists were not just relapsing into traditional illusionary representation, but were utilizing figuration to "bring into question the artificiality of

[209] Ibid.
[210] Craig Owens, "Back to the Studio," *Art in America* (Jan. 1982): 101-102.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Owens, 103.

art and technological society"[213] and to return to a more "natural" expression of man. Recognizing that any "natural expression of man" is a mediated concept, Kuspit maintained that seeking a "natural attitude" is a meaningful endeavor nevertheless:

> Marxist critics assume that the "natural attitude" to things is the enemy, for it implies a refusal to suspend our relations with them for the sake of an analysis of our attitude toward them. Such disengagement presumably leads to an abstract understanding of their meaning. But in a world overdetermined by analytic abstractions – artificial understandings of all kinds – which seem to have an 'expressivity' of their own, the natural attitude toward things becomes a desirable if elusive goal, a critical factor for survival, and the only method for the recovery of concreteness and engagement.[214]

Kuspit argued that what these artists revealed to viewers was an understanding of subject-hood as a fictional construct, but that in exposing this artifice individuals would be able to recover and reconnect with an authentic identity.[215]

Another champion of the new painting who coherently defended these artists was the American painter and critic Peter Halley, who also argued that the Neo-Expressionists were producing a new form of painting that was relevant to the contemporary world and that they were not simply recycling outdated imagery evocative of the early twentieth-century expressionists. Halley argued that post-modern artists such as the Neo-Expressionists recognized that an individual's identity and perception of the world was neither fixed nor inherent, and that the ideologies and systems of the world around them played a role in determining each person's identity, which was, in fact, a de-centered, multiple and fragmented identity:

> …perhaps in the work of these artists a strange new emotion is emerging in response to the particular conditions of these times, an emotion that would not have been recognizable as an emotion before. With their understanding of self in shambles, their senses numbed by the reverberating phrases, sounds and images of the mass media, their ability to react curtailed by a lifetime of nuclear false alarms, ecological booby traps, sporadic global warfare, and political and economic turmoil, these artists are capable of

[213] Donald Kuspit, "Flak from the Radicals," in *Art after modernism: rethinking representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 138.
[214] Kuspit, 139.
[215] Donald Kuspit, "Rejoinder: Tired Criticism, Tired Radicalism," *Art in America* 71, no. 4 (April 1983): 15.

> neither clearly defined anger nor the orgasmic releases characteristic of earlier expressionisms. They have attended art schools and universities with unprecedented facilities for gathering art historical information. They have been exposed to a contemporary explosion of exhibitions, museums, catalogues and color reproductions….
>
> These artists are expressing an emotion that is based on some other part of the psyche than the ego, for typically these artists are deprived of any traditional sense of self. 'Self' in their work is an empty center around which many images revolve….
>
> And along with self, 'other' is missing. These artists no longer make claim to respond to an unmediated nature. In their work they are responding to culture rather than to any extra-human world…. Herein lies the difference that irrevocably separates these artists from other expressionisms: in treating not nature but culture, their expressionism is political, not transcendental.[216]

In Halley's view, when the Neo-Expressionists chose to incorporate references to the past within their work, they were doing so because both the past and the present are fragmented elements that helped constitute their shifting reality.

The disagreement between those in favor of the recent turn toward expressionist painting and those against its return centered in part on assessments of the social-political relevancy of these artists' undertakings. Both sides recognized that the artists' attempts to deal with their fragmented subjectivity was central to their objectives, but whereas Halley and Kuspit saw these artists as successfully dealing with and exploring contemporary existence, Owens, Crimp and others such as such the influential art historians Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh viewed the artists as responding in a reactionary manner to their existential condition. Furthermore, they saw these artists as failing in their pursuit of subverting the artifice of cultural constructs through their adoption of past artistic styles and modes of representation. Foster labeled these artists' mistaken belief that expressionist visual language could transcend its mediated status and offer a contemporary expression of subjective experience "the expressionist fallacy:"

> Neo-Expressionism appears then as a problematic response to this loss – of the historical, the real, and of the subject. By and large, the Neo-Expressionists would reclaim these

[216] Peter Halley, "A note on the 'New Expressionism' Phenomenon," *Arts Magazine* 57 (March 1983): 89.

> entities as substances; the work, however, reveals them to be signs – and Expressionism to be a language. This, finally, is the pathos of such art: it denies what its practitioners would assert. For the very gestures that insist on the presence of the historical, the real, and of the subject testify to nothing so much as a desperation at their loss.[217]

Focusing his attention specifically on the revival of painting by German Neo-Expressionists, Buchloh accused these artists of no longer creating progressive, critical art of the avant-garde, but instead reflecting the current authoritarian character of socio-political systems. As symptomatic of the German artists' culpability in perpetuating a conservative state of affairs, Buchloh identified these artists' return to traditional practices as a reconnection with their nationalistic cultural identity. Buchloh pointed to the similar return to tradition and embrace of nationalism that occurred among early-twentieth century artists who responded to the economic and political crises under the fascist powers in Italy and Germany. Buchloh proposed a correspondence between the two periods[218] and argued that this new art form was indicative of larger socio-cultural issues that needed to be addressed:

> The question for us now is to what extent the rediscovery and recapitulation of these modes of figurative representation in present-day European painting reflect and dismantle the ideological impact of growing authoritarianism; or to what extent they simply indulge and reap the benefits of this increasingly apparent political practice; or, worse yet, to what extent they cynically generate a cultural climate of authoritarianism to familiarize us with the political realities to come.[219]

A supporter of Neo-Expressionism, the German art critic Wolfgang Max Faust, countered that this return to a national cultural heritage was not "nationalistic," since this would imply that German artists saw their cultural tradition as superior to others, as had occurred with the Third Reich. He saw this return instead as an attempt by the artists to address parts of their culture that

[217] Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," *Art in America* 71, no. 1 (January 1983): 137.
[218] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984),124-125.
[219] Buchloh, 108.

had been neglected during the three decades of international art.[220] Similarly, the American art historian Marcia Vetrocq argued that the Italian Neo-Expressionist Transavantgarde painters chose to investigate and rehabilitate "the Italianness of Italian art, long discredited by its association with fascist cultural politics…."[221] Buchloh, however, linked this reversion to the past with attempts by European artists to raise their status within the competitive international art market[222] after three decades of its domination by New York artists.

One of the first significant exhibitions held in the 1980s that re-asserted the importance of the medium of painting and proposed that European artists were at the forefront of this research was "A New Spirit in Painting," held in London's Royal Academy of the Arts in 1981. This international show brought together thirty-eight American and European painters, promoting three generations of artists that included new talent emerging in the early 1980s soon associated with "Neo-Expressionism." Also included were more established painters such as Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol who had continued to pursue painting during the 1960s and 1970s. The exhibition curators, the art critic Christos Joachimides, the Royal Academy's Exhibitions Secretary Norman Rosenthal and the director of London's Whitechapel Art Gallery Nicholas Serrota, sought to champion in this exhibit artists who were unique in their approaches to painting, working in an expressionistic, often figurative, manner that helped to rethink, according to the curators, the established 1950s American narrative of abstract painting as being the "only universally acceptable art [and that] anything else was at best provincial."[223] Shifting the spotlight from the New York art scene, "A New Spirit in Painting" showcased the work

[220] Mina Roustayi, "Crossover Tendencies: An Interview with Wolfgang Max Faust," *Arts Magazine* 62, no. 6 (Feb. 1988): 65.
[221] Marcia E. Vetrocq, "Utopias, Nomads, Critics: From Arte Povera to the Transavantgarde," *Arts Magazine* 63, no. 8 (April, 1989), 53.
[222] Buchloh, 125-127.
[223] Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal and Nicholas Serota, "Preface," in *A New Spirit in Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1981), 12.

primarily of Western European artists: eight English, eleven German, and another ten from France, Italy, Denmark, and Spain.[224] Nine of the artists were from America. According to Joachimides, after a long hiatus in the international art world, painting had finally become a crucial art form again. In particular this return to painting was related to:

> [A] certain subjective vision, a vision that includes both an understanding of the artist himself as an individual engaged in a search for self-realisation and as an actor on the wider historical stage. The subjective view, the creative imagination, has come back into its own and is evident in a new approach to painting. Artists, no longer satisfied with the deliberately objective view, are beginning to respond to their environment, allowing these reactions to be expressed in the form of images. We are confronted with an art that tells us about [the artists'] personal relationships and personal worlds…. It is the need to talk about oneself, to express one's own desires and fears, to react to daily life and indeed to reactivate areas of experience that have long lain dormant.[225]

Following "A New Spirit in Painting," Joachimides and Rosenthal curated the Berlin exhibition "Zeitgeist" at the Martin-Gropius-Bau Museum in 1982. As with the previous show, "Zeitgeist" signaled not only the embrace of traditional painting, but also asserted a shift toward Europe as the art-world leader. Once more Joachimides and Rosenthal gave preference to European artists, especially those from Germany, with a similar representation of 45 artists from eight different countries, many of whom had been represented in the previous exhibit.[226] American art historian Robert Rosenblum noted in his essay for the exhibition's catalogue that American painters were emerging from a "nationalist vacuum" and responding to the

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[224] Artists in this exhibition included: Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, Balthus, Georg Baselitz, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Alan Charlton, Sandro Chia, Rainer Fetting, Lucian Freud, Gotthard Graubner, Philip Guston, Dieter Hacker, Jean Hélion, David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, K.H. Hödicke, Anselmo Kiefer, Per Kirkeby, R.B. Kitaj, Bernd Koberling, Willem de Kooning, Jannis Kounellis, Markus Lüpertz, Brice Marden, Matta, Bruce McLean, Mario Merz, Malcom Morley, Mimmo Paladino, A.R. Penck, Pablo Picasso, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Robert Ryman, Julian Schnabel, Frank Stella, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol.

[225] Christos M. Joachimides, "A New Spirit in Painting," in *A New Spirit in Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1981), 14.

[226] Artists within this exhibition included: Siegfried Anzinger, Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Erwin Bohatsch, Jonathan Borofsky, Peter Bömmels, Werner Bütner, James Lee Byars, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Walter Dahn, René Daniels, Jiři Georg Dokoupil, Rainer Fetting, Barry Flanagan, Gerard Garouste, Gilbert & George, Dieter Hacker, Antonius Höckelmann, K.H. Hödicke, Jörg Immendorf, Anselm Kiefer, Per Kirkeby, Bernd Koberling, Jannis Kounellis, Christopher LeBrun, Markus Lüpertz, Bruce McLean, Mario Merz, Helmut Middendorf, Malcolm Morley, Robert Morris, Mimmo Paladino, A.R. Penck, Sigmar Polke, Susan Rothenberg, David Salle, Salomé, Julian Schnabel, Frank Stella, Volker Tannert, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol.

advancements made in Europe.[227] Joachimides asserted that the location of this exhibition in Berlin was no coincidence, because the city had been the center of this new Neo-Expressionist painting since the 1960s. These German painters who had persevered through two decades of conceptual art and "academically torpid minimalism," he argued, were revitalizing the art world.[228]

Many of the European critics and curators who supported the new painting sought to distinguish the work of American and European artists by locating the validity of the European works in the artists' rich cultural heritage, while American work was aligned with consumer interests, popular media and technology. In a 1988 *Art News* article "Inside Europe: The Temperature Is Lower," journalist Brigid Grauman surveyed many leading European art critics and summarized:

> Whatever fascination the Europeans may have with the American art scene, a new pride in homegrown art has been rapidly developing in Europe over the last few years. This pride is also one of the features that distinguishes the European from the American art scene, in a sense, it is self-awareness that has allowed European art to preserve its identity in the face of the increasing globalization and commercialization of the art world.[229]

One of these leading art critics Grauman interviewed was the Italian art critic Achille Bonito Oliva, the champion of the Italian Transavantgarde. Bonito Oliva asserted that it was the Transavantgarde artists who had initiated the great return to painting that was influencing American Neo-Expressionists such as David Salle and Julian Schnabel.[230]

Bonito Oliva, a friend of Celant's since the 1960s, had begun his career as an art critic supporting the work of artists associated with Arte Povera. Just as Celant's concept of Arte

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[227] Robert Rosenblum, "Thoughts on the Origins of 'Zeitgeist'," in *Zeitgeist* (NY: George Braziller, Inc. 1982), 19.
[228] Christos M. Joachimides, "Achilles and Hector before the Walls of Troy," in *Zeitgeist* (NY: George Braziller, Inc. 1982), 10.
[229] Brigid Grauman, "Inside Europe: The Temperature Is Lower," *Art News* 87 (April 1988), 115.
[230] Matthew Collings, "More and Less Passion: Achille Bonito Oliva: Interview with Matthew Collings," *Artscribe International* (February - March, 1986), 42.

Povera was in part a response to the international influence of American Pop and Minimalism on the Italian art scene, Bonito Oliva took a similar stance and clearly demarcated lines between U.S. and European artistic vision and production. In his 1976 publication, *Europe/America: The different avant-gardes,* Bonito Oliva identified essential differences between the European and American artistic outlooks. Whereas European artists remained connected to a critical dialogue within their rich cultural heritage, he wrote, Americans were pragmatic puritans who drew from their contemporary culture of capitalism and technology.[231] According to Bonito Oliva, the dominant international presence of U.S. art was due to the aggressive and "more advanced capitalist system in force in American society,"[232] which "tends to invade the whole world with its art merchandise."[233] The infiltration of U.S. art that flooded the international art world caused it to acquire "a higher quality status than that of the average product of European art. Thus the quantity, the strike-force of economic power, becomes quality, in that, objectively and fetishistically, it compels European collectors to soak up American art a priori."[234] Supporting his discussion of the importance of artistic practices being carried out in Europe, Bonito Oliva cited the work of artists associated with Arte Povera, along with others such as Joseph Beuys, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke.

Bonito Oliva's pro-European stance led him to celebrate a breakthrough in artistic practices by five Italian painters, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Sandro Chia, Mimmo Paladino, and Nicola De Maria, whom he labeled the "Transavantgarde" in 1979. Bonito Oliva introduced this new movement in his publication "La Trans-Avantguardia Italiana," in *Flash Art*

[231] Achille Bonito Oliva, *Europe/America: The Different Avant-Gardes* (Milan: Deco Press, 1976), 7-13.
[232] Bonito Oliva, 7.
[233] Bonito Oliva, 8.
[234] Ibid.

(November, 1979)[235] and with the first Transavantgarde exhibition, "Opere fatte ad arte," that same year at the Palazzo di Città in the city of Acireale in Sicily.[236] Following his initial essay and exhibition, Bonito Oliva continued to promote these artists in multiple journal essays and exhibitions.[237] *International Trans-Avantgarde* (1982) offered Bonito Oliva's most fully developed views of the Transavantgarde and signaled his objective in applying this term to new painting practices occurring globally, much in the same manner as Celant's *Art Povera* (1969) had sought to apply "Arte Povera" to an international group of artists. After 1985, the Transavantgarde artists, whose works were never adequately defined by Bonito Oliva's term, moved in a variety of unrelated directions and achieved further success in their individual careers.

In the early 1980s, though, Bonito Oliva promoted these painters as a cohesive movement that transformed the contemporary global art world. The Transavantgarde artists had:

> developed a movement that was authentically European, one that had its roots in the history of culture and in the history of art and painting. With this movement Italy elaborated an artistic model which caused a shock to American culture, given that America does not have a long history. The Trans Avant Garde arrived at a particular moment for American society: when America did not have a strong identity, when it was in crisis, when it did not have an art able to portray the American spirit – American art of that time was Conceptual and Minimal art, a type of art which is firmly bound to the values of design, rationality, modularity. With the reintroduction of manual skill, allied to the concept of cultural nomadism and stylistic eclecticism, Trans Avant Garde art

[235] Although this essay unsympathetically contrasted the strengths of the Transavantgarde artists' works to their Arte Povera predecessors, Bonito Oliva had not entirely severed his support of artists associated with Arte Povera. At the same time of his *Flash Art* publication, he curated an exhibition, "Le stanze," that included contemporary Italian artists associated with both major Italian art groups, held at the Castello Colonna in Genazzano, Italy.

[236] This exhibit showed the work of all five Transavantgarde artists, which is why I have referred to it as "the first." Bonito Oliva did curate two exhibits, "Drawing- Transparence" (1976) and "Tre o quattro artisti secchi" (1978), which included some of the artists who he would later identify as Transavantgarde artists.

[237] Achille Bonito Oliva published numerous (though often redundant) essays on the Transavantgarde from 1979 to 2011. Most of his activity occurred between 1980 and 1982, when he published fourteen essays on the group. Following this period he published one essay every few years. Similarly, most of the Transavantgarde exhibitions occurred during the early 1980s. By 1985 the artists had moved stylistically in new directions and pursued individual careers and Bonito Oliva turned to support a new group of Roman artists, among them Bruno Caccobelli, Domenico Bianchi, Giuseppe Gallo and Gianni Dessì, who were creating more formal and less expressionistic paintings. (Collings, 43.)

> proposed a model of expressive liberty which startled the American mentality, bound as it was by the idea of evolution of art. For this reason – and also because of that puritanical aspect of American morality which recognizes the value of an art unlike its own models – and in a moment of cultural vacuum, the Trans Avant Garde arrived and was able to dominate the museums and collections and the mentality of taste of America.[238]

Boldly positioning the Italian Transavantgarde as *the* European art movement that toppled U.S. hegemony of the art world, Bonito Oliva also denounced Arte Povera as an international movement aligned with American Minimalist and Conceptual art. Bonito Oliva criticized the Arte Povera artists' attempt to operate within an international mindset, claiming they had lost and alienated themselves from their "deepest cultural and anthropological roots."[239] He admonished Arte Povera for being accepted by the U.S. market and sharing in their Anglo-Saxon, Protestant mentality.[240]

Despite his suddenly venomous attack on Arte Povera, Bonito Oliva had once been a keen supporter of their work. [241] In his essay for the 1968 "Arte povera + azioni povera" exhibition in Amalfi, Bonito Oliva saw the Arte Povera artists' vital and anti-repressive works as thwarting the neo-capitalistic system at the time:

> Initially, the artist and his work are also immersed in this politico-existential falsehood. It is objectified in network of functions, and the work is devoid of a clear intention of integration or subversion. It is swallowed up by the market and changed into a commodity thanks to the traditional channel of propagation, the gallery. In this privileged space, the esthetic object takes on a connotation of privilege that augments its desirability. Thus an exhibition, instead of constituting the practicing space of cultural

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[238] Collings, 42.
[239]Achille Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," *Flash Art*, no. 92/93 (October/ November 1979): 18.
[240] Collings, 42.
[241] Achille Bonito Oliva supported the work of Arte Povera artists in essays such as: Achille Bonito Oliva, "Against the Solitude of Objects," in *Arte povera + azioni povere* (Salerno: Rumma editore, 1969); Achille Bonito Oliva, "Amore mio," (Centro Di Florence, 1970); and Achille Bonito Oliva, "Vitalità del negative nell' arte italiana" (Centro Di Florence, 1970). Bonito Oliva also continued to mount shows that included work by artists associated with Arte Povera in exhibitions thorughout the 1970s and 1980s: the Italian Pavilion in the 7th Biennale di Paris (1971); "'Persona,' International Theatre Festival" held in Belgrade in 1971; the 38th Venice Biennale exhibition "Dalla natura all'arte alla natura. Artenatura" (1978); "Le Stanze" held in Genezzano in 1979; the 39th Venice Biennale exhibition "L' arte degli anni settanta" (1980); "Avanguardia, Transavanguardia" held in Rome in 1982; "Artisti italiani contemporanei 1950-1983" held in Vencie in 1983; and "Terra Motus 2" held in Heruclaneum in 1986.

> community, intensifies a loss of meaning in the work and lowers the work to the status of a commodity among commodities. Consequently the system tends to keep art in an elaborate cage where the esthetic operation is carried to completion. And the operation has to take on the linguistic specific as its only field of practice and formation. In this way society has the tendency to preserve the notion of the avant garde, a concept that is now innocuous to the extent that it guarantees (for the system) that art is a sequence of languages in historical development, without links (except metaphorical ones) with reality. The system thus tends to constitute a closed metabolism for art, a Darwinian metabolism in which the esthetic product descends from linguistic ancestors that have been shaped and modified in time. To this aseptic and specialistic notion of the avant garde the artist answers back with a more comprehensive operation that does not produce languages alone, but tends to recover the individual will and imagination as the means by which his esthetic-formative whim may design a landscape of more meaningful objects. The new objects propose a renewed trace of subjectivity in the work, which no longer appears as a closed system of signs, but as an elaborate life-bed of new meaning, specifically the meaning of doing as anthropological reconstruction of the psychosomatic apparatus of man.[242]

A decade after this essay, Bonito Oliva now claimed that the Arte Povera artists were aligned with the idealist and progressivist ideology of the modernist avant-garde and were only interested in breaking down tradition and following an evolutionary mindset and practice that pursued a line of art making that purified the art object of anything external to itself. Bonito Oliva argued that the "progressivist" artists such as Arte Povera, who had striven forward in their pursuit of admonishing the past and seeking a utopian future, had failed to achieve results with their attempt at using art to engage in a political discourse.[243] According to Bonito Oliva, during the 1960s the neo-avant-garde artists, such as the Arte Povera group, experimented with new materials, techniques and methodologies in a response to the "dynamic reality" occurring about them.[244] Yet by the 1970s, coinciding with the economic downturn and political turmoil occurring in Western Europe and the United States, artists no longer sought to push the frontier of avant-garde art practices. From his position at the time, Bonito Oliva saw the 1970s as a moment of crisis within the art world when it was no longer certain which direction art should

[242] Achille Bonito Oliva, "Against the Solitude of Objects," in *Arte Povera Art Povera* (Milan: Electra, 1985), 85.
[243] Achille Bonito Oliva, *The Italian Trans-Avantgarde* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1982), 12.
[244] Ibid., 6.

take.[245] Arte Povera artists and their attempts to use art as a political tool to address social concerns were no longer relevant or able to address the social world around them: "A moralistic, Franciscan tone pervaded the critical proposal which pathetically outlined the possibility of art as guerrilla warfare."[246] Bonito Oliva sharply criticized their work as being subordinated to the artists' political dogmas and mocked Celant's use of the term "guerrilla warrior" by referring to the Arte Povera mindset as having "childishly dressed art up as a guerrilla."[247]

For Bonito Oliva, the Transavantgarde signaled the end of progressive modernism and the new Postmodern Era. His decision to call the new group of painters the "Transavantgarde" reflected his belief that these artists were not tearing down traditional artistic constructs, but in fact celebrating their past, their national identity, and traditional forms of art-making.[248] By affixing "trans" to the term "avant-garde," Bonito Oliva affirmed that these artists were moving beyond and in a variety of temporal directions, unlike the avant-garde artists who were only progressivist. Bonito Oliva believed that the Transavantgarde artists were able to return to painting, but still break from a progressive, linear tradition, because he saw the late-twentieth century as a period of historical breakdown that allowed for new practices and manners of thinking to emerge. Signs and symbols were no longer fixed to any singular ideological meaning.[249] Bonito Oliva saw the Transavantgarde's embrace of the artifice of painting as a response to the previous 1960s generation of artists who preferred "presentation" of natural, real materials to the "representation" of culture.[250] He believed that it was the need to overcome the previous generation's omission of figuration that led the Transavantgarde artists to seek this

[245] Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," 17.
[246] Bonito Oliva, *The Italian Trans-avantarde*, 38.
[247] Achille Bonito Oliva, *The International Trans-Avantgarde* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1982), 38.
[248] Eleanor Heartney, "Apocalyptic Visions, Arcadian Dreams," *ArtNews* 85 (January 1986): 86-87.
[249] Bonito Oliva, *The International Transavantgarde*, 16.
[250] Bonito Oliva, *The Italian Trans-Avantgarde*, 24.

return to a culturally constructed language of art that would be able to articulate human experience.[251] He charged Arte Povera artists with producing an austere, moralistic art that was both repressive and masochistic.[252] In contrast to the impoverishment of Arte Povera, Bonito Oliva identified the work of Transavantgarde artists as opulent, sensual, emotionally expressive, and subjective.

Just as Celant had utilized a dichotomy between "rich" and "poor" art, Bonito Oliva stressed the same distinction within his own writings. He favored a "rich" art that drew from a variety of languages, ideologies, and artistic styles. Bonito Oliva identified the Transavantgarde artists as following a "pleasure principle" with sumptuous, rich and emotion-laden depictions, distinguishing these artists from their more conceptual peers, such as artists associated with Arte Povera, whose works he described as following the "reality principle."[253] Bonito Oliva emphasized the Transavantgarde artists' "opulence" of material, decoration, and sign, as well as their absorption of a variety of styles expressed through their use of saturated hues of paint, to contrast them rhetorically with previous decades of cerebral, physically austere, and minimalist artistic creations.

In addition to celebrating the Transavantgarde artists' return to the sensual and expressive medium of painting, Bonito Oliva also applauded these men as figures of individual genius. Unique attributes of the Transavantgarde, which Bonito Oliva saw as distinguishing these artists from previous conceptual and minimalist producers, were the incorporation of personal and subjective motifs into their artistic language, the throwing off of the mentality of the past, and an

[251] Bonito Oliva, *The International Trans-Avantgarde*, 40.
[252] Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," 5.
[253] Bonito Oliva, *The International Trans-Avantgarde*, 20.

embrace of the sensual, the psychic, and the pleasurable within their art.[254] According to him, the Transavantgarde works embraced a subjectivity in their work that had been purged by Arte Povera artists who created depersonalized and political art. The Transavantgarde artists reveled in the pleasure of depicting personal subject matter through traditional painterly techniques that were devoid of any of the "intellectual worries" or ideological burdens associated with Arte Povera works.[255] Bonito Oliva considered Arte Povera creations as being fraught with a heavy conceptualism that weighed upon and halted the freedom of instantaneous, creative expression which the Transavantgarde artists were able to express with their nomadic, emotional outpourings. Their work no longer needed a driving rationale that addressed external events outside of the artistic moment of expression.

In his framing of Arte Povera as the epitome of all that was wrong with art making, Bonito Oliva appropriated and subverted from Celant's rhetoric the concept of the "cultural nomad." For Bonito Oliva the idea of nomadism was tied to the way Transavantgarde artists drifted aimlessly in all directions, picking up signs and expressions from all areas of culture, history, and lived experience. In particular, Bonito Oliva emphasized in his writings the Transavantgarde artists' embrace of their local and regional heritage, their "*genius loci*," although the artists themselves could not agree with this claim. According to the Transavantgarde artist Mimmo Paladino, for example, although Bonito Oliva was astute in his analysis of his work, he did not believe Bonito Oliva was correct in locating the inspiration of his work so strictly in his local regional roots. For Paladino, his inspiration was derived not only from Southern Italy, but also from the larger international art world and to this extent, Paladino did recognize himself as a cultural nomad:

[254] Ibid., 32.
[255] Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," 10.

> For me it means crossing the various territories of art, both in a geographical and temporal sense, and with maximum technical and creative freedom. So if, on the one hand, I feel close to Giotto and Piero Della Francesca, on the other I pay attention to byzantine and Russian icons… I believed that the superficial glance is very much in keeping with the fast moving times we live in, which don't allow for breaks.[256]

Such pilfered, fragmented signs were used incidentally and as the artists saw fit. It was through this freedom of expression that the Transavantgarde artists were able to offer viewers a pleasurable viewing experience, which required only the viewer's contemplation of the object, unlike the "open work" of the previous avant-garde, "which needs the spectator's interaction to be brought to perfection."[257] The nomadism of the Transavantgarde, therefore, referred to these artists' stylistic appropriation from cultural traditions. The nomadism of Arte Povera, in contrast, was a concept developed by Celant alluding to the artists' movement through space and time. In his view, the confined and frozen nature of painting and sculpture was transgressed by the Arte Povera artists who sought to capture an energy and mobility within their work.[258] Bonito Oliva argued that, unlike Arte Povera, the Transavantgarde artists offered viewers a final and complete work that provided "a place of satisfying contemplation where the mythic distance, the far-away contemplation, [was] brimming over with eroticism and energy originating in the work's intensity and in its internal metaphysics."[259]

According to Bonito Oliva, the Transavantgarde artists' return to painting and their embrace of personal content succeeded in capturing within their work an expression of

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[256] Angela Vettese, "Mimmo Paladino," *Flash Art* (May 1987): 99

[257] Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," 19. Bonito Oliva's critique of Arte Povera parallels Michael Fried's similar critique of Minimalism in his influential 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood." Fried criticized Minimalist artists for creating "objects," not "art," when they sought to produce works that placed emphasis upon the work's connection to the surrounding environment and its reliance on viewer interaction. "Art" for Fried was an autonomous creation, composed of elements formed to produce an aesthetic whole and which could be experienced by the viewer in its entirety within one glance. For Fried, "art" was best represented at the time by color field painters such as Morris Louis. [Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago and London: The Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1998).]

[258] Germano Celant, "A History among Stories," 29.

[259] Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," 19.

contemporary existence: a fragmented, subjective identity, which challenged the "myth of a unity of self."[260] He further claimed that the artists' references to subjectivity were not necessarily meant to be autobiographical, but were intended to signal a move away from purely conceptual art and a return to the expressive qualities of painting.[261] The artist' own vision, according to Bonito Oliva, was just one of many meanings: the artwork stabilized the uncertainty of meaning without causing it to become fixed.[262] While the 1960s artists, Bonito Oliva claimed, were striving to achieve "monumental and heroic ideas"[263] within their art, the Transavantgarde artists focused on the specific, the nuanced, and the local fragmented elements that make up daily life. Whereas the Transavantgarde celebrated the subjectivity of the artist and his personal vision, Arte Povera artists created works that sought to express the contingency of existence within culture, nature and society.

After Bonito Oliva's initial attack upon Arte Povera, Celant was quick to retaliate in his strike against the critic and the Transavantgarde. Celant's view of the Transavantgarde artists was clear in his projects of the 1980s. In 1981, invited by the Centre Georges Pompidou's Director Pontus Hulten, Celant curated "Identité Italienne. L'art en Italie depus 1959" at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. This show was intended as a response to Hulten's previous exhibitions "Paris-New York" (1977), "Paris-Berlin 1930-1933" (1977) and "Paris-Moscow 1900-1930" (1979), through which Hulten set out to create a new narrative of the history of modern art.[264] Out of the eighteen artists Celant invited to show in "Identité Italienne," only one

[260] Ibid., 19-20.
[261] Bonito Oliva, *The International Trans-Avantgarde*, 10.
[262] Bonito Oliva, "La trans-avanguardia italiana," 18.
[263] Bonito Oliva, *The Italian Trans-avantgarde*, 21.
[264] Celant, "A History among Stories," 20.

painter associated with the Transavantgarde, Nicola De Maria, was asked to exhibit his work, along with Arte Povera and other contemporary Italian artists.[265]

The same year Celant curated the exhibition "Il gergo inquieto: Inexpressionismo americano" in Genoa, examining diverse artistic practices occurring in the U.S., primarily in New York, by artists such as Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and Joan Jonas.[266] Celant outlined in the exhibition catalogue a new territory of art making that he perceived as opposed to Neo-Expressionism, which he termed "unexpressionism." Celant later extended this term to apply to a broader range of artists for his publication *Unexpressionism: Art Beyond the Contemporary* (1988).[267] This collection of artists working in various artistic media had been identified by Celant during his travels in the U.S. and Europe during the 1980s. These artists confronted in their work the challenges of a reality deconstructed and a heightened pressure to express the contemporaneity of the moment that remained ever elusive. Like the Neo-Expressionists, the unexpressionists used appropriated signs and symbols from various cultures and times, yet these acts of pilfering were distinct. Whereas the Neo-Expressionists' use of cultural signs was not necessarily divorced from the ideology behind them, the unexpressionists did not identify with the signs they utilized, but instead used them to critically comment upon their artifice.[268]

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[265] The artists included in this show were: Giovanni Anselmo, Marco Bagnoli, Alighiero Boetti, Enrico Castellani, Gino De Dominicis, Nicola De Maria, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Francesco Lo Savio, Piero Manzoni, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, Giuseppe Penone, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Mario Schifano, and Gilberto Zorio.

[266] Artists included in this exhibition were: Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Matt Mullican, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Richard Prince, Grahame Weinbren, Jim Fulkerson, Gerald Incandela, Barbara Kruger, Joan Jonas, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Andy Warhol Enterprises.

[267] Artists discussed in this publication were: Remo Salvadori, Sherrie Levine, Niek Kemps, Jeff Wall, Annette Lemieux, Günther Förg, Ettore Spalletti, John M. Armleder, Cindy Sherman, Rebecca Horn, Barbara Kruger, Gerhard Merz, Jenny Holzer, Gretchen Bender Juan Muñoz, Allan McCollum, Ange Leccia, Haim Steinbach, Rosemarie Trockel, Matt Mullican, Marco Bagnoli, Reihard Mucha, Peter Fischli David Weiss, Tony Cragg, Bertrand Lavier, Joseph Kosuth, Robert Longo, Lothar Baumgarten, Thomas Schütte, Richard Prince, Jeff Koons, and Jan Vercruysse.

[268]Germano Celant, "Introduction: The Marble Period," in *Unexpressionism: Art Beyond the Contemporary* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1988), 5-29.

In 1982 Celant was invited by Rudi Fuchs, the Director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven to co-direct "documenta 7" in Kassel, Germany. For this exhibition of nearly 200 artists working in all forms of artistic media, the Transavantgarde and Arte Povera artists were shown side by side. Celant's essay for the exhibition catalogue "A Visual Machine: Art installation and its modern archetypes," summarized his perception of the current direction artistic practices were heading, with the return of traditional modes of art making coinciding with the growth in public patronage and the increase of exhibition production. Celant argued exhibitions "facilitate the reading of the work" and that the installation "is in and of itself *a form of modern work*." [269] The practice of exhibition making, therefore, must be given serious consideration. Tracing the development of exhibition practices from the mid-nineteenth century salons through the following century, Celant elaborated upon how the architectural environment functions in a relationship with art objects, providing meaning to the context of the works and potentially transforming viewers' engagement with art into an active experience. This important essay was closely tied to Celant's interest in moving beyond the traditional exhibition practice of displaying a series of isolated objects and toward recognizing the importance of the larger context within which artistic production was being carried out, including the dialogue between the object and its environment and the object's relationship to larger cultural and political frameworks. Celant's commitment to this area of research would deepen in the following decades and has been closely tied to his advocacy for critical art forms that challenge the perpetuation of institutional mechanism, exemplified, in his view, by exhibitions such as "Zeitgeist" and "A New Spirit in Painting" that satisfied a consumer appetite for traditional modes of art making displayed in conventional gallery spaces.

[269] Germano Celant, "A Visual Machine: art installation and its modern archetypes," in *documenta 7*, vol.2 (Kassel: Druck Verlag, 1982), 1981. Republished in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 373.

In 1985 Celant was invited by Roald Nasgaard, chief curator of the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, to be a guest curator for the exhibition "The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy Today." This exhibition asserted that important artistic research had been overlooked in the two countries when most of the art world's attention was turned to the New York art scene.[270] The title referred to the fact that the spectacular works of the young American Neo-Expressionists who were hailed by some as leaders of the art world were in fact only the tip of the iceberg. The exhibition catalogue included artists working in a variety of mediums, such as: Giovanni Anselmo, Rebecca Horn, Anselm Kiefer, A.R. Penk, Emilio Vedova, Sigmar Polke, Aldo Rossi, Werner Herzog, Lina Wermüller, Mimmo Jodice, and Dieter Rams. For the catalogue essay Celant renewed his sentiments concerning the need for iconoclastic artists "who perceive the problems of real existence and move in relation with the multiplicity of times and contexts."[271]

After these major exhibitions, Celant turned his attention directly to Bonito Oliva's critique of Arte Povera with a series of exhibitions that reunited the artists after more than a decade of individual shows, reaffirming the continued importance of Arte Povera in the 1980s. The first of these Arte Povera exhibitions was presented at the Mole Antonelliana in Turin in 1984 and was followed by a 1985 show in Madrid at the Palacio de Velázquez, Palacio de Cristal and Parque del Retiro. The next Arte Povera show in the series, "The Knot: Arte Povera at P.S.1," occurred in New York that same year. For this exhibition's catalogue Celant published a

[270] The New York Times review for the show was dismissive: "This ambitious show, attended by a pretty but uninspired photography section, and displays of trendy design and architecture, has been given lots of rooms, with several works to a creator. The artists have had free rein. But from a New York point of view, it doesn't bring us very exciting news of what's been going on in Europe while our backs were turned. Much of it we've known all along, and too much of what we see here is not all that consequential. The show's handsome catalogue 'reads' more interestingly than the art." Grace Glueck, "Gallery View; Toronto Stages a 'Jam Session of the Arts'," *The New York Times* (February 24, 1985).

[271] Germano Celant, "The European Concert and the Festival of the Arts," in *The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy Today* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985), 21.

series of essays on Arte Povera he had composed over the years and which elaborated his 1960s perceptions of the group's work. In "A Critical Art" (1983), Celant examined his concept of critical art and his identification of Arte Povera as a "critical art" practice. Celant posited that critical art was a way in which artistic practices were rethought and better understood to be part of a larger cultural whole. This mode of art making no longer considered art as an autonomous practice only in dialogue with itself. Critical art was not just an art that critiques the external world, he wrote, but an art form that critiqued itself too, analyzing its own ideological structures and the institutional frameworks it operates within.[272] The goal of this self-critique was to liberate art from the confines of its construct. Art making could then be seen as a social action, another tool with which to understand humankind's lived experience and its relationship to the larger world.[273]

Celant identified the Arte Povera artists as producing critical art diametrically opposed to the superficial pursuits of the Transavantgarde, which Celant perceived as relying on past artistic styles in a regressive manner. In line with Buchloh's claims, Celant perceived the Transavantgarde artists' embrace of nationalistic symbolism to be reactionary and to resemble the "return to order" of the fascist era in Italy and Germany.[274] Failing to offer any creative substance, these artists churned out easily consumable art that dazzled the eye, but not the mind. Celant described the Transavantgarde artists' use of fragmented imagery as mere quotation of previous works of art: "More emphasis is placed on listing sources than on arousing historical

[272] Germano Celant, "A Critical Art," in *The Knot Arte Povera at P.S.1* (Long Island City, N.Y.: P.S.1, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources; Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1985), 11-12.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Germano Celant, "The Italian Complexity," in *The Knot Arte Povera at P.S.1* (Long Island City, N.Y.: P.S.1, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources; Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1985), 44.

anxiety."[275] Celant cited Transavantgarde artist Sandro Chia's appropriations of imagery from early twentieth-century Italian artists, for example, as revealing "a cultural localism that loves to contemplate its own navel. It is a meaningless activity, in which painting becomes showy and artificial, and therefore rhetorical."[276] In "The Italian Complexity" (1985), Celant elaborated his complaint:

> What counts is that they [the Transavantgarde painters] move themselves and the public with the wonders of beautiful painting. In this way the artist does not participate in the historical moment, but only furnishes a technique and gives a demonstration of ability, both of which are forced to go back to images and figures of the past recognizable to the mass media public as "real art" in order to appear valid.[277]

Furthering this attack in "An Iconoclastic Art" (1984), Celant identified the Transavantgarde artists as celebrating an artistic vision that remained disconnected from the external world, while artists such as those associated with Arte Povera were iconoclasts tearing down and deconstructing artificial, ideological constructs to reveal their workings and a better understanding of the multiplicity of reality.[278]

For "The Knot" exhibition, Arte Povera works were chosen that spanned the artists' entire careers. These ranged from late 1960s works such as Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Orchestra of Rags* (1968) [fig. 20] to installations composed in the 1980s such Giuseppe Penone's *Four Landscapes* (1985) [fig. 21]. This display was intended to demonstrate not only the continued powerful presence of the early work, but also the enduring relevance of these artists' critical inquiry into the state of contemporary art making. While many of the artists questioned with their new work traditional modes of painting and sculpture, as they had done in the past, this line of inquiry seemed especially relevant in light of the recent popularity of Neo-Expressionism.

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[275] Germano Celant, "An Iconoclastic Art," *The Knot Arte Povera at P.S.1* (Long Island City, N.Y.: P.S.1, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources; Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1985), 8.
[276] Germano Celant, "The Italian Complexity," 45.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Germano Celant, "An Iconoclastic Art," 8-11.

The reception of "The Knot" was varied. Two reviews in *The New York Times* that year were not fervent in their praise, and seized upon the narrative characterizing these artists as being the antagonists of Neo-Expressionism. Vivien Raynor claimed that while the Arte Povera artists were not breaking new ground, they were at least demonstrating that there was more to contemporary Italian art than the Transavantgarde.[279] Grace Glueck heavily cited Celant's dismissal of the Transavantgarde artists, though she quoted him as saying that he was not so much against the Neo-Expressionists' work itself, but the manner in which it was handled – the way these artists were chasing commissions and selling themselves for commercial success. [280]

Succumbing to the lure of commercial success was an accusation also directed at the Arte Povera artists during this time. Critics found fault with many of the artists who appeared to be becoming painters after their time spent as Conceptual artists. Of the thirteen Arte Povera artists, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz and Pier Paolo Calzolari in particular had been producing more work that incorporated painting into their artistic production. Moreover, these three artists were being showcased in exhibitions that included the Transavantgarde. For "A New Spirit in Painting" Joachimides cited these three artists as having opened the form of painting into an "object-painting of suggestive power."[281] Yet these artists' response to the return to painting had a critical objective. For "Zeitgeist" Kounellis installed within the windows of the Martin-Gropius-Bau fragments of stone and sculpture, wooden beams and various objects such as a mandolin, hat and oil lamp. This work, imbedded within the window frame read as a two-dimensional surface, yet its physical composition of real materials used to block the window's

[279] Vivien Raynor, "Art: From Italy, A show of 12 Called 'The Knot'," *The New York Times* (Oct. 18, 1985).
[280] Grace Glueck, "Conceptual Art, Italian Style, Makes a Statement at P.S. 1," *The New York Times* (Oct. 13, 1985).
[281] Joachimides, "A New Spirit in Painting," 15.

view denied any sense of painterly illusionism and the work's site-specificity defied its status as an object of consumption [fig. 22].

Roberta Smith was among the critics who seized the opportunity to suggest that Arte Povera artists were betraying their principles:

> It is interesting to see Merz and Kounellis turn their earlier *arte povera* elegance completely pictorial. But while their work helped make the show's ["A New Spirit in Painting"] definition of painting seem more current, they could also be accused of jumping on the return-to-painting bandwagon with a certain calculation. Merz's images are slick, mischievous scams on his own earlier themes, rather decorative depictions of animals pierced through with his ubiquitous neon tubing. Kounellis' stacks of faces (or skulls) bring to mind Pollock – as well as whole choirs of Munch screamers; this is pattern painting with *angst.* Yet they are also just big drawings, and it seems to me a bit premature to embrace their maker as a painter (particularly considering some of the major painters not in this show). [282]

Echoing Smith, the Italian art critic Francesco Bonami stated that Arte Povera artists such as Merz, Calzolari and Kounellis had "succumbed to the allure of painting" in order to remain successful within the international art scene.[283] Contrary to Bonami and Smith's generalizations, however, several Arte Povera artists did not outlaw traditional forms of art making. Kounellis, whom many scholars refer to as a sculptor, performer or installation artist, for example, considers himself a painter in a broad sense[284] and is not against the act of painting per se.[285] Kounellis does believe, though, that the artist must be an ethical figure who should offer a critique of the real world.[286] Not only Kounellis, but also Merz and Calzolari incorporated aspects of painting into their work, and other Arte Povera artists did so as well. Giulio Paolini, Giovanni Anselmo and Michelangelo Pistoletto in particular engaged in a critical dialogue with

[282] Roberta Smith, "Fresh Paint," *Art in America* 69 (June 1981):76-77.
[283] Francesco Bonami, "Now We Begin," in *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), 113.
[284] "1979 Interview Robin White," in *Echoes in the Darkness: Jannis Kounellis, Writings and Interviews, 1966-2002*. Eds. Mario Codognato and Mirta d'Argenzio (Great Britain: Trolley, Ltd., 2002), 166.
[285] Ibid., 172.
[286] Ibid., 167.

traditional painting practices, deconstructing its language and investigating the potential of the medium to communicate in a new manner.

Celant defended the Arte Povera artists' "painterly" pursuits in his essays on the group and the individual artists, explaining the vast differences between their approach to painting and the work of the Transavantgarde artists. For example, Celant's 1983 essay "The Collision and the Cry: Jannis Kounellis"[287] traced the artist's commitment as a critical artist from his early paintings of the mid-1950s to his work in the 1980s. Kounellis' early alphabet paintings captured both the illusory and the real through their appropriation of letters, numbers and signs lifted by the artist from the urban graffiti on walls and street signs that filled the bustling Italian cities. In an untitled painting from 1960, representative of his work at the time, Kounellis stenciled letters and symbols onto the canvas, filling them in with black enamel, which gave them a raw, painterly, as well as industrial appearance [fig. 23]. The imagery appears to float above the surface and to enter into the viewer's environment just as it might inhabit the spaces of daily life. During the 1960s Kounellis' painterly, fragmented signs gave way to fragmented objects and raw materials such as fire, coal and live animals. In his 1983 essay, Celant traced the artist's use of materials through the utopian vigor of the late 1960s to their transformation in quality and spirit that mirrored the pathos of the 1980s: "Thus the artist's attitude, who believed in the negative and critical functions of his work and saw himself falling prey to a tide of foul-smelling pictorial compromises, could be nothing but radical, revealing the drama of an obscure, dark period."[288]

Celant's observations reference work such as a 1979 installation at the Galleria Christian Stein in Turin in which Kounellis drew in charcoal on the gallery's walls an industrial city street

[287] Germano Celant, "The Collision and the Cry: Jannis Kounellis," *Artforum* (Oct. 1983), 61-67. Reprinted in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan, Electra 2011).
[288] Germano Celant, "Jannis Kounellis," in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan, Electra 2011), 90.

rendered in linear perspective with multiple buildings and a smoking factory chimney [fig. 24]. To the right of this large-scale drawing were a series of five vertically stacked drawings of women's heads and landscapes. The standard fare of traditional Western art took on an ominous tone as these drawings faintly emerged in white lines through a thick black carbonized material evocative of soot that covered the paper. The column of drawings that appeared from a distance to be five burnt-out voids seemed to confront the adjacent billowing chimney.[289] A pall was cast over the industrial landscape adjacent to these pictures as Kounellis impaled the bodies of two stuffed birds, a jackdaw and a hooded crow, to the wall with arrows. These immobilized, dead blackbirds were the antithesis of Kounellis' live parrot in his iconic 1969 installation. The vibrant energy of the parrot's colors, movement and sound that activated the affirmative 1960's environment was transformed in the 1980s into the silence of death, signaling for Celant "the end of all lightness and of all liberating imagination" at the hands of painting: "The messengers of the unknown and of dream were murdered by the quick and instantaneous 'thinking and painting' of the arrows."[290] In a similar permutation, Kounellis' use of fire in his work of the 1960s and 1970s, symbolic of transformative energy, prophecy and purification within Western culture, became soot in his work of the late 1970s and 1980s.

Celant described Kounellis' work of this period as exuding history.[291] It was during the 1980s that Celant began to elaborate upon the Arte Povera artists' engagement with their cultural identity that began to emerge in their work during the 1970s and was now fully apparent. Celant's essay, "Knot Art" (1985), for the P.S.1 exhibition explored this aspect of the artists' development; as noted in Chapter Two, the metaphor of "the knot" referred to the Gordian Knot,

[289] "Jannis Kounellis," in *The Tate Gallery 1982-84: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1986), 221.
[290] Celant, "Jannis Kounellis," 91.
[291] Ibid., 87.

a symbol of the complexity of the various contexts, including echoes of myth, references to tradition and traces of history that fed Arte Povera production.

In the exhibition Penone presented *Four Landscapes* (1985) [fig. 21], which combined a painting of trees rendered on un-stretched canvases hung on the wall with an installation of numerous terracotta pots filled with dirt organized in front of the painting. Within these pots were crudely rendered human forms that appeared to be made out of tree bark, but were actually cast bronze. These four figures walked, lay and sat across the pots' surfaces. Emerging from within their bodies were laurel plants that grew from the soil, recalling the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne. Just as the installation circumvented traditional sculptural materials, forms and iconography through the organic growth of the plants and the reconceptualization of a classical myth, the expressionistic landscape painting was rendered not with oil paint, but with leaves rubbed onto the canvas.

Another example of a work exhibited at "The Knot" by an Arte Povera artist who has critically engaged the constructs of traditional art forms and cultural history throughout his career was Paolini's *Cupid and Psyche* (1981) [fig. 25], an assemblage that merged painting with sculpture. Rendered through photo emulsion on a large canvas was a drawing of the back of Psyche's head and shoulders. Extended from the figure's two-dimensional torso were silken banners of colored fabric that were attached at the base of the painting's stretcher. The fabric cascaded down the wall and extended across the floor in silky streams of color. Within the fabric were positioned seven wooden stretcher frames. Psyche, who in the Greek myth is unable to look upon the beauty of her lover, Cupid, has her head turned away from the viewer, unable to see the vivid spectrum of colors unfurling into the lived environment as though suddenly freed from the confines of an illusionistic painting.

Celant located the artists' existential ease with cultural fragments within their historic context. Within Italy, history is not a thing of the past, but something that reverberates in the present day:

> A limitless stretch links the history and architecture of Milan and Rome, Genoa and Turin, Bologna and Florence. We see a crisscross of all possible ruins and fragments, without centers or entrance gates…. Everything is confused and interwoven, like a Gordian Knot, made up of memories and archeological strata, design and technology, craft and rapid transit, artifice and nature. What remains is the experience of disorder and unexpected combinations. The impermanence flows from all places and is filled with ruins and remnants, uncomposable things and unwonted textures, collisions of languages and events, in which form and rhythm cannot be contained in an orderly way. Works of art are uncertain and changing signs, based on a strange and senseless geography.[292]

Celant contrasted the Arte Povera artists' fluid references to cultural identity with that of the Neo-Expressionist painters, who he identified as trying to secure and reassure themselves and society of an enduring national identity through their embrace of traditional art forms that reaffirmed bourgeois cultural values.[293]

The Arte Povera artists' references to their cultural heritage, furthermore, were not consistent with the Transavantgarde artists' use of appropriation. Arte Povera artists incorporate imagery from the past that can be used to provoke reflection within viewers about their own existence within history. The Transavantgarde artists were concerned primarily with how the imagery from the past spoke first and foremost to their own personal histories. The Transavantgarde artists' approach to fragmentation can also be distinguished from the Arte Povera artists by the manner in which these artists intend the meaning of their works to be produced. For the Transavantgarde artist, the fragmented signs were drawn from diverse linguistic fields and were interpreted, organized and fixed by the artist within his composition.

[292] Celant, "Knot Art," in *The Knot Arte Povera at P.S.1* (Long Island City, N.Y.: P.S.1, the Institute for Art and Urban Resources; Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1985), 4-5.
[293] Ibid., 8.

Arte Povera artists select raw materials with symbolic connotations that can be enhanced by the environment in which they are placed, providing more open-ended opportunities for viewers to find meanings drawn from their own experiences.

The "rivalry" between the Transavantgarde and Arte Povera and their supporting critics had a sensational quality that easily fed magazine and newspaper articles, fueling an intense fire that died just as rapidly within the decade. Despite Bonito Oliva's and Celant's attempt to create a divide between the Arte Povera and Transavantgarde artists during the 1980s, the Transavantgarde artists often spoke of the influence the previous generation of Arte Povera artists had upon them. In 1994 there was an attempt by the Fondazione Mudima and NICAF[294] to unite the two movements in the exhibition "Italiana: from arte povera to transavantgardia" that was held in Yokohama, Japan. The exhibition was curated by Tommaso Trini and Gino Di Maggio. Trini's catalogue essay, "Meeting Point," argued that outside of Italy, viewers might not realize how influential Arte Povera had been upon Transavantgarde and that this show offered the chance to explore this dialogue.[295]

In 2002 the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea outside Turin exhibited a retrospective of the Transavantgarde artists' works curated by the director of the museum, Ida Gianelli. For the exhibition catalogue, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's essay, "The Italian Transavantgarde: a Rereading," offered an insightful explanation of the artists' work that argued for interpreting the Transavantgarde painting as a continuation of the radical modern avant-garde

[294] NICAF is a commercial art fair in Japan.
[295] Tommaso Trini, "Meeting Point," in *Italiana: from arte povera to transavanguardia* (Milan: Mudima, 1994), 8.

instead of being a Post-Modern break.[296] In this regard the Transavantgarde shared commonalities with Arte Povera:

> For instance, organic aesthetics, a critique of Darwinian positivism, the embracing of uncertainty and complexity as positive values, and anti-intellectualism also characterized much of Italian Arte Povera, and distinguished it from the more rationalist tendencies of Minimalism and Conceptualism in the 1960s. Germano Celant, in writing about Arte Povera in 1967, speaks of 'de-culture' – de-civilizing – as an important need in the Sixties. Similarly, in 1979, Bonito Oliva wrote of the Transavantgarde that: 'Here concentration becomes de-concentration, the need for catastrophe, the rupture of social need' and speaks of the artists as 'blind visionaries'. Arte Povera was about impoverishment not only of means and techniques, but also of the mind, in order to open culture up to basic phenomenological experience. Furthermore, Arte Povera was not intent on eradicating cultural roots and the Arte Povera artists valued craft and tradition enormously.[297]

Christov-Bakargiev located the radical spirit of the historical avant-garde in the Transavantgarde artists' embrace of anti-intellectualism as seen in the motif of "the idiot," a figure that appeared in various forms within their work. Just as some historical avant-garde artists such as the Dadaists questioned the progressivist ideology of modernity and played the role of the fool through their absurd stances to reveal the folly of ideologies, the Transavantgarde artists often expressed a sense of the ridiculous within their figurative paintings. In these works Christov-Bakargiev perceived the Transavantgarde artists as pursuing "the radical anti-intellectualism of anarchist and libertarian vanguards, not the refined, polite and conservative language of other highbrow returns to traditional painting, a certain return to order and power that were also present in the culture of the 1980s."[298]

Reflecting on the period, Celant recalled the general excitement over the provocative nature of the Transavantgarde paintings, which celebrated the individual subject, portrayed in exposed and vulnerable states. Yet, while women, homosexuals and other minority artists were

[296]Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The Italian Transavantgarde: a Rereading," in *Transavantgardia* (Milan: Skira editore, 2002), 76.
[297] Ibid., 88.
[298] Ibid., 91.

fighting for the recognition of their subjective identity in artistic media that challenged conservative ideology, the male Transavantgarde artists' self-disclosure was done within the safety of easel painting, brushwork, and the white gallery space.[299] Arte Povera and other critical artists broadened their investigation into this art form, exploding the two-dimensional surface into the three-dimensional world and demonstrating its function as a tool to engage contemporary socio-cultural issues. Celant's return to Arte Povera in the 1980s was a reminder to the art world of the potential critical art-making holds. Celant's advocacy for these artists and his voice of concern over the state of the art world was one among many, yet his perseverance helped reinforce the direction of contemporary critical art-making.

[299] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 19, 2013.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN INDEPENDENT CURATOR: CELANT'S EXHIBITION CAREER, 1988-2008

In 1971 Celant's critical stance toward corporations and cultural institutions was summarized in his untitled essay for the "Arte povera" exhibition held in the Munich Kunstverein that year. According to Celant, artists such as those associated with Arte Povera and Conceptual Art had failed to create artworks that could resist absorption by the art market. Celant called for even more radical activities by artists, activist groups and intellectuals. Yet over the course of the subsequent two decades, Celant withdrew from a theoretical position that had once supported the action of the Weathermen Underground. As Celant's career developed, he acknowledged that the art market is capable of accepting and absorbing all artistic production, even art that critiques the system.[300] According to Celant, an artist's ability to offer a radical critique and an "alternative way of thinking and seeing" is no longer regarded as a primary raison d'être for art-making. [301] What dominates the role of visual art in society today, he acknowledges, is "its economic performance in terms of the rise and fall of values."[302]

Instead of choosing the course of nonparticipation in a tainted system, as some intellectuals and artists decided was the higher path,[303] Celant remained within the elite art world and effected change from the inside out. A marked shift can be seen in Celant's career when he curated the exhibition "Ambiente/arte dal futurismo alla body art" at the 1976 Venice Biennale.

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[300] Germano Celant, "A History among Stories," in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan: Electra, 2011), 14.
[301] Germano Celant, "The American Tornado," in *The American Tornado: Art in Power 1949*-2008 (Milan: Skira, 2008), 34.
[302] Ibid.
[303] For example, Carla Lonzi decided to leave art criticism and the Italian artist Piero Gilardi refrained from producing art objects for over a decade as a denunciation of the commercialization of art. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999), 37.

Celant considers this project to be the beginning of his large-scale exhibition career.[304] It was during the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, following his reinstatement of the term "Arte Povera," that Celant found himself pulled even more into the fast-paced world of museum exhibitions. An examination of Celant's exhibition career, supported by a discussion of key examples of the diverse curatorial projects he has undertaken, will illustrate the breadth and complexity of Celant's career and reveal some of the underlying tenets of Celant's curatorial practice.

A pivotal moment in Celant's career came in 1988 when Thomas Krens, the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, invited Celant to join a new team he was forming at the museum. Celant was the first European art critic to be asked to join such a group in America and he continued to hold his position as Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim until 2008.[305] This is an important period in Celant's career. His assistance in restructuring and expanding the Guggenheim corresponded with his own research into new territories of artistic language. This venture also brought Celant, along with the Guggenheim Museum itself, more directly into the evolving globalization of artistic practice and the art market. In 1995, Celant's expanded his curatorial scope by accepting the position of Artistic Director at the Prada Foundation.[306] The unique agendas of these two institutions, the Guggenheim Museum and the Prada Foundation, I will argue, coincide with Celant's desire to rethink and dismantle hierarchical art-world structures and traditional curatorial practices.

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[304] Germano Celant, "Germano Celant: Sharing a Dream. From the 'Warm' Interaction with Artists to the 'Cold' Task of Exhibiting Artwork, Celant's Method is a Blend of Approaches," *Domus* 940 (October 2010): 96. This exhibition focused on artist installations of the twentieth century from Futurism to Body Art. In Celant's typical fashion, he approached the theme by locating the subject matter within its historical context. He began with the Italian and Russian Futurists and concluded with works of contemporary site-specific artists such as Jannis Kounellis, Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys and Daniel Buren. This exhibition is discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

[305] Celant, "A History among Stories," 20.

[306] The Prada Foundation was originally founded in Milan in 1993 as the PradaMilanoArte by Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli. The foundation was renamed in 1995 when Celant joined Prada and Bertelli in their efforts to provide artists working in new media with the facilities and support they required.

A major topic Celant addresses throughout his writings is the operation of the art market and its control over artistic output. Celant laments the limelight placed on individual artists and the lack of attention given to artistic practices that involve collaborative activities. He also claims that, in order to manufacture an easily consumable artistic product, the art market tends to ignore the larger cultural context within which artistic research emerges.[307] Counteracting this trend, Celant reaffirms the complex cultural-historical context interwoven within artists' narratives and the collaborative dialogue within which artists are engaged. Celant sees the current form of "hero worship" of celebrity-artists as an effect of the 1980s, when the structures of grand narratives and ideologies collapsed and the art market turned to glorify individual artists. "Up until the 1980s," according to Celant, "we could speak of 'trends,' i.e. Pop, Minimal, Conceptual, Land, Body, Neo-Expressionism, Transavantgardia, Pattern, Neo-Geo, Graffiti … today [2010] that specific power of assembled contributions has vanished. All that emerges is the isolated and the solitary."[308] In Celant's view this tendency is facilitated by:

> …the laziness of museums that in Europe and America have increasingly focused on straightforward monographic displays, leaving aside any effort to study historical and contemporary nuclei, and, on the other, by the market and auction houses' need to isolate the single product, outside of any general context or linguistic situation; this has contributed to exalting the mere object that has to be redeemed by the maker's outstandingness, not by its importance within a specific artistic and social-cultural context.[309]

Celant was beginning his career in 1965 when the funding structures of U.S. museums were shifting. Art museums had been primarily funded by individual philanthropists, yet within a decade the structures of museums were being transformed by corporations, foundations, and government agencies.[310] The dramatic economic shifts that occurred within museum institutions

[307] Ibid., 12.
[308] Ibid.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Victoria D. Alexander, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship, and Management* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), xi.

were also felt within the art market. In a 2008 essay, "The American Tornado," in which the tornado is a metaphor for the fast-moving and powerful pull of consumerism upon the world of art, Celant reflects on the developing proliferation of the decorative luxury product and the demise of critical art: "What was the result of thought and analysis, both critical and aesthetic, and offered insight into future developments has now become an object whose only positive outcome is an entity that can be discussed solely in terms of money,"[311] he concludes. In order for many artists to survive within the current art-institutional structure they must feed the realm of spectacle by producing more and more extraordinary objects and by marketing themselves as celebrities.[312] Likewise, for an art museum to function successfully it often is required to transform spaces, once meant to preserve cultural objects and promote an appreciation of art, into spaces dictated by the demands of consumerism:

> The crucial role of exploration in art disintegrated at this point [the twenty-first century] and was lost in a multiform combination of opaque and indefinable factors living on complicity with finance and tourism, the spectator and the collector, politics and diplomacy. These were organized in the expanded chain of museums, some of which pursued growth in order to become the Disneyland of the visual realm, like the Metropolitan in New York and the MoMA, with enlarged exhibition and commercial spaces designed by the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi. Others instead reverted to the narcissism of private collections seen back in the day of pure patrons like Frick and Guggenheim, like Pinault, Broad, Ullens, and Arnault. The dozens of art fairs and biennials – from Venice to São Paulo, Basel, and Miami – became pretexts for fashionable events and exotic journeys or came through the Internet to form part of the virtual fabric of data related to artifacts of design, painting, and sculpture. Some were publicized by the media and included in their flow of information and gossip to underscore the unity of the increasingly prestigious interweaving of artists, actors, stars, property tycoons, architects, film directors, industrialists, and fashion designers.[313]

In another 2008 essay, "A Force Field," in which the metaphor of a force field refers to an environment in which artistic languages have the freedom to be creatively expressed in dynamic and undefined ways, Celant reiterates his economic analysis:

[311] Celant, *The American Tornado*, 9.
[312] Ibid., 26.
[313] Ibid., 34.

> Today, in 2008, radical artistic thought and the historic reasons for its existence as 'critical thought' are in danger of being totally and definitively annihilated as they enter a spiral of globalized consumption that makes the auction house the sole determinant of value. Otherness gives way to one's chances for 'positioning' in a world market where an artwork's prospects for existence lie entirely in the ultimate satisfaction of the buyer, who is attracted solely by highly glamorous products or those symbolizing a buying power that will define his or her social status. At the same time, the decline of the artwork's oppositional and analytical value with respect to reality in favor of its economic value brings it definitively closer to the universe of design by driving art towards a purely decorative function in the environment in which it is exhibited as well as in the imagination of acquisition power.
>
> This position undermines art's need to exist as a process that transcends the public's demands and desires, plunging it inevitably into a world of alluring 'things,' however much some of these 'things' may ostensibly or unrealistically oppose the system of consumption. Reduced to the production of 'objects' and 'things,' art loses all claim to autonomy and begins to enter the world of 'products' just as Pop Art and Andy Warhol already anticipated. It becomes confused with other industrial entities and the lives alongside them, sharing the same system of promotion, commercialization and media consecration, being classified in the upper tier of 'exclusive' commodities. If this is what is happening, an examination of its productive process calls into a question its philosophical and political rationales, its antagonistic, adverse role, making it a fetish that - if not forced to adapt to the traditional, conservative requirements of generalized consumption because it hopes to broaden this area by introducing new images into it – cannot avoid responding to the 'innovative' impulses of industrial society, those that have the greatest impact on public taste.[314]

How did an art historian and curator such as Celant, so adamant about the effects of globalized consumption upon the art establishment, negotiate his position at the Guggenheim Museum in New York? The question is especially relevant, given many critiques of the Guggenheim's project of international expansion spearheaded by the director who hired Celant, Thomas Krens.[315] Celant's personal agenda as an art historian, critic, and curator promoting the

[314] Germano Celant, *Unveiling the Prada Foundation* (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2008), 11.

[315] Throughout Krens' tenure as the director of the Guggenheim his expansionist schemes for the institution raised much ire with colleagues on the foundation's board and within the public and media world. Krens' dubbed his program the "Global Guggenheim" whereas others referred to it as a "McGuggenheim" franchise. Currently, the Guggenheim museum network consists of sites in New York, Venice, Bilbao and Abu Dhabi (under construction). Under the Guggenheim's current director Richard Armstrong, who stepped into the position in 2008, the museum's expanding global network has continued to expand, undeterred by the previous decades of criticism and failure. During Krens' tenure numerous projects were either cancelled or closed in the cities of Las Vegas, Berlin, Salzburg, Vilnius, Guadalajara, Rio de Janeiro, lower Manhattan, Helsinki and Taiwan. In 2014 Armstrong attempted to revive the Guggenheim's attempts to build a satellite in Helsinki, Finland. This project was first proposed in 2012, but was rejected by the city who refused to pay the $130 million in costs as well as be associated with the tainted

latest and strongest advancements of critical avant-garde art practices was not incompatible, however, with Krens' ambition to push the institution further into the international art scene and to bring into its spaces the latest artistic advancements in the art world. A consistent motivation for Celant's working practice is the creation of a global and inclusive dialogue among "critical" artists who question systems of thought and the framework of traditional institutions. The position of Head Curator allowed Celant to pursue this goal not only as an art critic, but also as a contemporary art historian. After accepting this appointment, Celant stressed that it in no way diminished his identification as an independent curator. He refrained from even having an office in the Guggenheim Museum and continued to take on projects separate from the institution.[316]

Considering why such a well-established art museum such as the Guggenheim would want to work with such a radical art historian is as important as acknowledging Celant's objectives when taking his position. At the end of the 1980s the Guggenheim was in the process of making progressive steps towards promoting contemporary art and the cross-fertilization of

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"McGuggenheim" association. Armstrong has defended the Guggenheim's global endeavors by citing its latest project, the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative. This project is funded by UBS, a Swiss financial service company, and aims to bring foreign curators to New York and to showcase the work of contemporary global artists. The project specifically focuses currently on three regions: South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. Armstrong describe the Guggenheim's Global Art Initiative as an attempt to "identify and ally ourselves with the best thinkers, leaders of contemporary art in places less familiar to us [and] to make certain there's a high sense of recognition not only from our side to whoever's on the outside, but also on the outside toward us. We want to be seen as an outstanding peer." Michael Z. Wise, "Rethinking the Guggenheim Helsinki," *Art News- New York* 113, no. 8 (2014): 44-46; Saloni Mathur, "Social Thought & Commentary: Museum Globalization," *Anthropology Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 697-708.

[316] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18, 2013. Although Celant's ability to remain an independent curator while also working as the Head Curator of Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim Museum was somewhat unusual at the time, others have assumed similar roles in the twenty-first century. This precedent has been more common in Europe. For example, Harald Szeemann was appointed to the position of "permanent independent curator" at the Kunsthaus in Zürich in 1980, allowing him to curator exhibitions for the museum while also taking on separate projects. A primary reason for museums to allow for this flexibility is that high-profile independent curators can bring notoriety without further expense to the institution. This was the case when Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art's senior curator, Francesco Bonami, organized the 2003 Venice Biennale and in the instance of Celant's "Arts & Foods" exhibition for the 2015 Triennale in Milan. [Fabien Pinaroli and Karla G. Roalandini-Beyer, "Harald Szeemann's Biography," in Individual Methodology (Zürich: JRP/Ringier Kunstverlag AG, 2007), 197; Melissa Milgrom, "Behind the Scenes; Independent Curators: Have Art, Will Travel," The New York Times (April 24, 2002), http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/24/arts/behind-the-scenes-independent-curators-have-art-will-travel.html].

artistic languages, both high and low, a goal consistent with Celant's practice. As the Head Curator of Contemporary Art, Celant could offer the museum wide-ranging art world connections in Western Europe and unique insights into the contemporary art scene, which Celant had been honing over the past two decades. When Celant joined the curatorial staff at the Guggenheim, Krens had only recently just stepped into the position of director the previous year. Krens, whose educational background is in both art history and business,[317] had taken the reins of a nearly bankrupt institution and a building that was in a state of disrepair.[318] Krens shocked many in the New York art world with his dramatic overhaul of the formidable institution. He was attacked by other museum directors and the grandchildren of Peggy Guggenheim for his fiscally based decisions. In response to his critics, Krens argued that a vital institution would only occur through a renovation of the entire structure.[319] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many art museums, both private and public, were in dire financial straits. Institutions such as the Guggenheim, Celant observed, "could either go bankrupt or transform the institution into an enterprise with a 'capital' of masterpieces belonging to the history of the modern and contemporary world."[320] Instead of acting conservatively during a period of financial crisis, Krens fundamentally changed how the museum was operated.

The Guggenheim Museum was originally known as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting when it first opened in 1939 with the purpose to support the work of artists creating

[317] Alexander, *Museums and Money*, 105. Krens studied art history at Williams College and has a Master of Public Policy and Management degree from Yale University. He was director of the Guggenheim from 1988 to 2008. He is currently a senior adviser of international affairs for the Guggenheim, overseeing the completion of the latest Guggenheim satellite museum being built in Abu Dhabi.
[318] Alex Prud'homme, "The CEO of Culture Inc.: Controversial Guggenheim Director Thomas Krens Is Changing the Way the World's Art Museums Operate," *Time* 139, no. 3 (January 20, 1992): 36.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Celant, "The American Tornado," 27.

two-dimensional, non-figurative and non-narrative art objects. [321] The museum's first director and curator, Hilla Rebay, believed that sculpture was "too corporal and of the earth in relation to the spiritual aspirations of "non-objective" art."[322] The museum was renamed the Guggenheim Museum under the next director, James Johnson Sweeney, who began to avidly collect sculpture upon Rebay's resignation in 1952. Until Krens' appointment in 1988 the Guggenheim's collection emphasized mainstream modernist painting and sculpture. It was Krens' goal to update the museum to include contemporary trends within the visual arts. Site-specific, ephemeral and conceptual art of Minimalist and Post-Minimalist artists were acquisitions needed for the museum's restructured identity. In order to finance the enlargement of the Guggenheim's collection to include more contemporary art, Krens made a controversial decision to sell three paintings: Marc Chagall's *Birthday* (1923), Amedeo Modigliani's *Boy in Blue Jacket* (1916) and Wassily Kandinsky's *Fugue* (1914).[323] With this new capital, the Guggenheim was able to purchase over 300 new works from the Panza Collection, which helped broaden the scope of the institution to include more contemporary work by conceptual and minimalist artists such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, Richard Serra, James Turrell and Robert Morris.[324]

Krens' vision for the Guggenheim would extend its operations to numerous satellite museums on various continents, making the Guggenheim the first art museum to open several

[321] Angela Starita, "Keeping Faith with an Idea: A Time Line of the Guggenheim Museum, 1943-59" in *The Guggenheim: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Making of the Modern Museum* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2009), 143. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was founded in 1937. The director, Hilla Rebay, selected Frank Lloyd Wright to design the museum in 1943. Construction took sixteen years with the building opening in 1959.
[322] Nancy Spector, "The Museum as Catalyst: Artist Installations at the Guggenheim," in *The Guggenheim: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Making of the Modern Museum* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2009), 129.
[323] Grace Glueck, "Guggenheim to Sell 3 Works to Help Buy Others," *New York Times* (March 23, 1990).
[324] Giuseppe Panza di Biumo was an Italian collector of art. He began collecting in 1956 with a focus on European *Art Informel* artists and American Abstract Expressionists and then later became one of the first in Europe to collect work by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Mark Rothko, Donald Judd, Bruce Nauman, Carl Andre, Brice Marden, Robert Ryman, James Turrell, Sol LeWitt, and Richard Serra.

international locations.[325] Although Krens and his expansionist plans received much criticism, the precedent for Guggenheim satellites had been established prior to Krens' arrival at the museum. In 1976 Peggy Guggenheim transferred to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation ownership of her collection housed in Venice at her residence, the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni. Peggy Guggenheim had opened her collection to the public in 1951, displaying Cubist, Surrealist and European abstract paintings and sculptures. Krens' strategy to develop additional satellite museums would allow for larger museum attendance as well as more exhibition space. In 1988 the Guggenheim in New York could only exhibit about three percent of its 6,000 works,[326] and this plan allowed the Guggenheim to put on display a greater portion of its collection.[327] Krens' scheme also conserved funds because the brunt of the costs for the satellites would fall upon the host governments to finance the cost of building and operating the new museums. Compensation for the host governments would be the income derived from the tourism generated by the Guggenheim's visiting collection on display in the new exhibition space.[328]

One of Krens' initial moves as director of the Guggenheim was to hire three new curators in 1989: Celant as the Head Curator of Contemporary Art; Carmen Gimenez, who had directed national exhibitions for the Spanish Ministry of Culture and is the founder of the Reina Sofia Art

[325] Prud'homme, 36.
[326] Prud'homme, 36.
[327] Celant, "The American Tornado," 14. In addition to the exhibition space offered by the satellite museums, Krens had an addition attached to Wright's original structure and he opened a new exhibition and office space in the Soho district. The Soho district, referred to by Celant as a "huge department store of contemporary art," was a central hub of the latest in art practices and therefore an ideal location for the Guggenheim to extend itself and diversify its identity beyond the antiquated Museum Mile of Upper Manhattan. The Soho branch was closed in 2001 due to financial setbacks and lack of an interested audience. The building was then bought by the Prada Foundation and remodeled by Rem Koolhaas. Other Guggenheim satellite projects during this time also failed. Shutting down in 2008, the Guggenheim in Las Vegas also was unable to sustain itself financially and to draw an interested crowd. Lee Rosenbaum, "The Guggenheim Regroups: The Story Behind the Cutbacks," *Art in America* 91 (2003); David D'Arcy, "An Ever-Expanding Universe: A rare interview with Thomas Krens, the embattled director of the Guggenheim," *Art Review- London* (October 2003): 42-45.
[328] Paula Weideger, "The supreme commander of the Guggenheim empire," *New Statesman* 127, no. 4373 (February 20, 1998): 42. The city of Bilbao, Spain, for example, paid for the entire production including Frank Gehry's new museum building and $50 million for new acquisitions Krens selected for the space. In addition the Basques gave the Guggenheim foundation $20 million to be considered part of the Guggenheim collective.

Center, was hired as the Curator of Twentieth-Century Art; and Mark Rosenthal, previously the curator of Twentieth-Century Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, became a Consultative Curator for the Guggenheim.[329] All three have in common underlying interests in promoting an international range of artists. Each of the new members of Krens' curatorial team had established close ties with a variety of artists and Krens' expectation was that these curators would bring "the artists and their work closer to the museum."[330]

Krens chose Celant for his "insightful and agile criticism," his "remarkable contribution to the exhibition and documentation of art of the last 30 years" and the "broad spectrum of his interests, which encompass art, architecture, performance and design."[331] Krens saw Celant as a "key shaper of the institution's future purpose."[332] Celant understood that the new forms of artistic practices could not be treated as autonomous objects on the model of modernist painting. Celant recognized that:

> Site-specific or context-specific work has its own logic when it comes to art criticism and 'linguistics'…. In the early '70s, by putting into practice what I had learned while studying [Marcello] Nizzoli and working at *Casabella,* I observed how art critics and art historians were unable to interpret or linguistically manage the physical surroundings and the method of exhibitions. They proceeded by fragments of attention to single objects. I began collaborating with architects, interior designers and graphic designers in order to exchange ideas and create an in-depth display of art.[333]

The architectural structure of exhibition spaces such as the New York Guggenheim restricted the genres of artistic production viewers can experience within these architectural formats. In order to expand the Guggenheim's collection and to allow for diverse installation settings Krens commissioned the American architect Frank Gehry to design two of the

[329] Celant stepped down from his position at the Guggenheim in 2008. Gimenez became the Stephen and Nan Swid Curator of Twentieth-Century Art in 2006, a position previously held by Robert Rosenblum. Rosenthal held the position of a consultant for seven years and was promoted to Curator of Twentieth-Century Art in 1996.
[330] Grace Glueck, "An International Team at the Guggenheim is looking outward," *New York Times* (July 31, 1989).
[331] John Russell, "Guggenheim Names Curator," *New York Times,* December 1, 1988, C20.
[332] Germano Celant, *Mario Merz* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim and Milan: Electra, 1989), 13.
[333] Celant, "Germano Celant: Sharing a Dream," 96.

Guggenheim's new satellite museums. The first, located in Bilbao, Spain, was completed in 1997 and the second, still under construction, is in Abu Dhabi.[334] The potential of Gehry's designs was recognized early by Celant; he later introduced Gehry to Krens. Celant's relationship with Gehry formed during the 1970s when Celant was living in Los Angeles. In 1985 Celant wrote the introductory essay for Gehry's first monograph and curated his first anthology at the Museo di Rivoli the following year.

Architecture has been a major field of interest for Celant since his earliest foray into the field with his 1968 monograph on the designer and architect Marcello Nizzoli. Celant's attraction to Gehry's work reflects their shared interest in the "cross-pollination of form and function, materials and space that belongs to the fluid attitude with which the twenty-first century began."[335] The structure of the Bilbao Guggenheim, which references Frank Lloyd Wright's rotunda in the New York Guggenheim, draws from the aesthetic atmosphere of the Spanish City, and unites the languages of art and architecture in a baroque manner.[336]

The mid-twentieth-century exhibition space of Wright's rotunda has posed a challenge for many artists who have tried to accommodate their installations to the spiraling architecture. Celant's first curatorial project as Head Curator at the Guggenheim was a 1989 exhibition of Mario Merz's work and the grafting of the art within the space was deemed a success. Fittingly, Celant's first venture was a milestone not only for himself, but also for his good friend, for whom the show was his first solo exhibition in the United States. Additionally, the exhibition

[334] Both projects are enormous in scale. The Bilbao Guggenheim is a total of 24,000 square meters, with 10,500 square meters dedicated to exhibition space. Sean Rainbird, "Guggenheim Museum. Bilbao," The Burlington Magazine 140, 1138 (January, 1998): 62. The Abu Dhabi Guggenheim is 450,000-square-foot. Stephanie Cash, "Abu Dhabi and Guggenheim Agreement," Art in America 96, no.1 (January 2008): 33.
[335] Celant, "Germano Celant: Sharing a Dream," 97.
[336] Irene Nero, "Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Architecture: The Guggenheim Bilbao," Ch.10 in *Baroque Tendencies in Contemporary Art*, edited by Kelly A. Wacker (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 189-211.

was the museum's first retrospective exhibition of the work of a single living artist that occupied the entire space of the Guggenheim, signaling the museum's support of a new range of contemporary artists.

In planning the exhibition, Celant and Merz together assessed the unique structure of the Guggenheim's spiraling rotunda, collaborating in the installation of the artist's fragile and ephemeral works. Merz's show consisted of a variety of objects that ranged from two-dimensional works to multimedia installations. The artist and Celant decided that Celant would fold Merz's canvases and adjust them to the unusual diagonal walls and gallery platforms within the space. In this way Merz's work became an organic entity that worked within the flow of the environment instead of in opposition to it.[337] The central piece of the exhibition, *Unreal City, Nineteen Hundred Eighty-Nine* (*Città irreale, Millenovecentottantanove*), was designed specifically for the Guggenheim's entrance floor [fig. 26]. This site-specific work, consisting of three interconnected igloo-shaped domes and comprised of glass, mirror, and metal pipes attached together with clay and clamps, created a dialogue with the dome-like structure of Wright's spiraling rotunda.

After the Merz retrospective, Celant undertook for the Guggenheim a major 1994 exhibition of nearly three decades of Italian art in a show entitled, "The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968." This immense, interdisciplinary exhibition explored numerous Italian artistic expressions. A particularly strong emphasis was placed on Italian fashion, in part for its ability to capture the rapid cultural, social, political and economic transformations that occurred in the years after WWII. Importance was also placed on revealing the merger of high and low art forms that dissolved and morphed as numerous artistic languages collided. Furthermore, this was an

[337] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18th, 2013.

opportunity for Celant to further draw the international art community together and to highlight the achievements of post-war Italian art.[338]

Celant's introductory text, "Reasons for a Metamorphosis," carries his persuasive call for the creation of socio-critical art in a world of consumerism and speaks to the reader in a tone that rings of a manifesto. The show examined how certain cultural-historic events of 1943 to 1968 inspired the direction of Italian art-making. The project also attempted to rethink narratives of Italian cultural history in order to reconnect the contemporary artistic practices with those of the early-twentieth-century Italian Modernist art. As with many of Celant's essays, he chose to use a powerful and poetic metaphor to summarize the overarching theme and issues surrounding the exhibition. Often Celant's metaphors relay a sense of dynamic energy, such as a tornado, Eros, a force field, or the act of cutting.[339] For "The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968," Celant's use of "metamorphosis" spoke to the transformation of the Italian art scene from the conclusion of the Second World War until the moments of social unrest occurring at the end of the 1960s. Metamorphosis also refers to the recognition that art objects are not static, autonomous forms distinct from the world around them. Art is engaged within the cultural moment as its meanings shift and take on new connotations. Metamorphosis alluded, therefore, to a fluidity of language, to art as a tool of communication within the broader world. "Metamorphosis" also references artistic creation that is non-hierarchical, open to transformation and the osmosis of languages and

[338] Thomas Krens, "Acknowledgments," in *The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994), viii.
[339] Germano Celant, "The American Tornado," in *The American Tornado: Art in Power 1949-*2008 (Milan: Skira, 2008); Germano Celant, *Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2004); Germano Celant, *Unveiling the Prada Foundation* (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2008); and Germano Celant. *Art/Fashion.* New York: Distributed Art Publishers; Milan: In cooperation with Skira editore, 1997.

unfixed meanings, sought by many artists in the 1960s, and which Celant personally associated with his "baroque vision."[340]

In addition to reaffirming his concern for the state of art-making within the current art market, Celant also discusses in this essay the direction he believes contemporary museums must move. The role of the contemporary museum must adapt and morph: these institutions can no longer function as places to display autonomous art objects held at a distance from the viewer on the wall or pedestal, to be contemplated in isolation. They must become spaces in which the complex languages of art can be deciphered and read:

> I believe the museum must abandon its monotheism and the theology of art if it is to represent its link with other archipelagoes of communication and production. The plan is to arrive at a critical point of view that accepts different forms of exposition, analysis, and historicizing of the visual language as a dynamic energy and a transgressive movement among the arts. The spilling over, or at very least the mutual involvement, of all the visual practices is essential to an understanding of a historical period, especially if it becomes symbolic of a change or transformation of the culture or society as a whole.
>
> The treatment of a cultural epoch should not admit any disciplinary limits. It is the history of images and ideas, projects and customs, objects and documents, and for this reasons it is obliged to include every aesthetic language: architecture, art, comics, cinema, design, fashion, literature, photography, theater, artists' crafts. Such an ambitious approach is rarely attempted, however, because the preference is to maintain a theology of art that defends art as an absolute, unique relation. In the monotheistic, idealizing intentions of its historians, this religion is not supposed to betray any dialectical relationship with the other languages of communication.[341]

Among the outcomes of "The Italian Metamorphosis" was Celant's collaboration with Luigi Settembrini, who curated the section of the exhibition on the history of Italian fashion from 1951-1968. This new friendship led to the next major event in Celant's career. In 1996, along with Settembrini and Ingrid Sischy, Celant served as co-Artistic Director for the first Florence Biennale. Celant had a previous working relationship with Sischy, the editor of *Interview*

[340] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18th, 2013.
[341] Germano Celant, "Reasons for a Metamorphosis," in *The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1994), xvii

magazine. Since 1977 Celant and Sischy had been contributing editors to *Artforum*, a journal devoted to all languages of art, which flourished under their guidance.[342] The conception for Florence's first biennale was launched when the three met in 1994. This biennale, they decided, would focus on contemporary culture and fashion. Launching the inaugural show with the theme "Of Time and Fashion," they explored the multidisciplinary relationship between fashion and the larger visual art world. By juxtaposing seven contemporary artists' installations with the work of seven fashion designers, the "Art/Fashion" portion of the biennale, located at Forte Belvedere in Florence, emphasized fashion as a form of communication.

The aim of Celant, along with that of his co-artistic directors, was to confirm fashion's importance within the art world and to recognize its contribution to culture on a plane distinctly different from the superficial level of attention it receives in mass media. The exhibition highlighted the continual dialogue between the visual arts and fashion and its historical roots. The format of this show was consistent with Celant's ambition to create an open, inclusive space for osmosis to occur between different artistic disciplines and to break down the univocality of a closed system of art produced by individual, celebrity-artists.

To contextualize the artistic directors' agendas and their belief that fashion deserves to be recognized for its cultural importance, they compared the current status of fashion design to the art of photography in the 1970s, which was seen as a lesser art form in part because of the mechanics of its medium. In 1973 the Keeper of Photographs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, John Szarkowski, published his book, *Looking at Photographs*, a text on how to write and talk about photography. Celant, Settembrini and Sischy chose the title of the biennale, "Looking at Fashion," to coincide with the implication of Szarkowski's text and to posit the

[342] Germano Celant, *Looking at Fashion* (Milan: Skira editore, 1996), 14.

importance of fashion as a visual language and as no longer distinct from other fine arts. Like all art forms, photography and fashion can be trivial, but both can also be wielded as a critical visual language.

From March to June of the following year, the Guggenheim brought the "Art/Fashion" portion of the biennale to the Guggenheim Museum satellite in Soho. This show focused on twentieth- century artists who have brought their visual art designs into the world of fashion and who have created wearable works of art. Again, the Guggenheim made the progressive step of promoting a cross-breeding of artistic languages, both high and low. This undertaking further expanded the museum's international scope as well as afforded the Italian art intuitions broader, global recognition.

According to Celant, in the early 1990s the Guggenheim was purposefully setting out to rethink its institutional role within visual culture, to embrace a wider range of artistic languages and to explore the "fusion" of these languages.[343] The Guggenheim was among the first museums, for example, to dedicate large-scale exhibitions to the work of fashion designers. Celant curated an exhibition of the Milanese designer Giorgio Armani's twenty-five-year career in the 2000 show, "Giorgio Armani." Celant's essay for the exhibition catalogue, "Giorgio Armani: Toward the Mass Dandy," focused on mergers among fashion, identity, mass

[343] Germano Celant, *Giorgio Armani* (New York, N.Y.: Guggenheim Museum: Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 2000), viii. It was also during this time that the Guggenheim Museum was under heavy criticism for financial maneuverings said to be consistent with those of a multinational corporation. For example, Giorgio Armani pledged $15 million dollars to the Guggenheim as part of a "global partner sponsorship" prior to his exhibitions at the Guggenheim museums in New York and Bilbao. Critics saw this "donation" as a quid pro quo for organizing his exhibit. The show was officially financed by *In Style* magazine, a fashion magazine that carried Armani advertisements. The Guggenheim was not the first museum to come under attack for such financial dealings. Prior to the Armani show, the Metropolitan Museum of Art mounted two separate fashion shows, one devoted to an exhibition of Dior's work, financed by the designer, and another for Versace, which was financed in part by Conde Nast, a publisher of fashion magazines such as *Vogue* in which Versace is an advertiser. Carol Vogel, "Armani Gift to the Guggenheim Revives Issue of Art and Commerce," in *The New York Times* (December 15th, 1999); and Lee Rosenbaum, "The Guggenheim Regroups: The Story Behind the Cutbacks," *Art in America* 91, no.2 (February 2003): 43.

communication and how the human body becomes a site for signifiers. In describing Armani's approach to fashion, one could easily imagine Celant using the same words to describe the work of an Arte Povera artist:

> He established no absolute boundaries, but expressed instead a dynamic, non-static notion that went so far as to allow clothing to exist as an open-ended, formless condition covering the closed form of the body. This tearing down of walls of opposition clearly reflected a cultural climate in which hard ideological divisions were dissolved; Armani mirrored this in the production of objects of apparel that correspond to the collapse of separateness and structure.[344]

Consistent with Celant's description of a critical artist, an artist who creates a "crisis" in the established norms of thinking and behaving, [345] he describes Armani as deconstructing and interweaving signs, drawing upon a range of cultural influences, and subverting traditional practices.[346]

In 1975 the world of fashion was changing from an enterprise designed only for haute couture to prét-à-porter. Armani, just emerging as a fashion designer, was a leader of this trend also being established by Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. The impetus behind this shift was indebted in part to the previous decade's socio-cultural events, in particular the revolts of 1968, which challenged established norms in sexual relationships and class structures. Fashion designers such as Armani created a new aesthetic that collapsed long-standing fashion trends. He rethought the business suit, now no longer a uniform meant to standardize the appearances of its wearers, but a new layer to an individual's identity. His clothing was conceived to convey an individual personality and to strip away established cultural signifiers associated with power, age, gender and wealth.[347]

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[344]Celant, *Giorgio Armani*, xviii.
[345] Ibid., xix.
[346] Ibid., xviii.
[347] Ibid., xvii

Armani is perhaps most recognized for his rethinking of the design of women's jackets and suits. Armani's creations coincided with the rise of third-wave feminism and the broadening of gender roles. The designer's pantsuits, such as those seen in his 1985-1986 fall/winter collection, offer the female form a relaxed silhouette with a slight articulation of the underlying form [fig. 27]. The classic padded jacket shoulders, for which Armani is known, assert the openness of a confident posture while de-accentuating a woman's bust. Armani's reconsideration of the suit allowed for women to don clothing once associated with the male workplace while at the same time dressing in attire that was neither strictly masculine nor feminine.

Just as the Guggenheim endeavored to recognize the importance of fashion, the museum also enhanced its support of photography by enlarging its photography collection and showcasing exhibitions of contemporary photographers including Francesca Woodman, Catherine Opie, Robert Mapplethorpe and Joel-Peter Witkins, as well as innovative thematic exhibitions such as: "Women on the Edge: Twenty Photographers in Europe, 1919–1939" (1994), "In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present" (1996), "Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography" (1997), and "Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945" (2007).

In 2004 the Guggenheim in Berlin and New York joined the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg to present Celant's exhibition, "Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition: Photographs and Mannerist Prints," in which Mapplethorpe photographs were juxtaposed with sixteenth-century Mannerist prints. The intention behind this show was to allow "for new readings and interpretations of classical themes, which Mapplethorpe and the Mannerists have

relentlessly pursued."[348] In the exhibition essay, "Mapplethorpe as Neoclassicist," Celant focuses on the artist's depictions of love, desire and sensuality that are at the core of human experience and how Mapplethorpe's art transforms conventional divisions between sexes into a changeable plurality of sexual identity. Celant stresses Mapplethorpe's ability to unite within his work a dialogue between idealized classical iconic images of the body that western minds have come to recognize throughout visual history, and unconventional, transgressive imagery that provokes the viewer with expressions of freedom, diverse experience and eroticism. Celant recognizes in Mapplethorpe's work the artist's attempt to work between the boundaries of sculpture and photography as well as the temporal boundaries from the classical past to the neoclassical present, which one could call a "nomadic" approach. Just as Celant recognizes Arte Povera artists as iconoclasts who criticize absolute truths and reject univocal visions, Celant also identifies Mapplethorpe as an iconoclast, an artist who uses iconic imagery in such a way as to crack open the idealized form and allow the indeterminate nature of reality to be expressed.[349]

In support of his discussion, Celant points to Mapplethorpe's *Jamie* (1974) [fig. 28], a three-quarter length portrait of a listless, nude youth standing in a pose evocative of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* (1513-15) [fig. 29]. Jamie, whose torso is partially concealed by long locks of sensuous hair cascading downward, stares directly at the viewer. His serpentine pose and languid physique emphasize his androgyny. By appropriating a recognizable classical pose of a Renaissance statue and translating it into the intimate flesh of a live model captured by the voyeuristic lens of a camera, an exchange opens between media and historic periods. Jamie's pose is iconic and timeless, yet the boy's presence, confrontational as well as carnal, makes him of the moment and made not of marble, but of living, sensuous flesh. According to Celant,

[348] Celant, *Robert Mapplethorpe and the Classical Tradition*, 10.
[349] Ibid. 45

Mapplethorpe utilizes tradition to communicate subject matter that was taboo in his time, "such as heterosexual and homosexual love, including sadomasochistic scenes. The exaltation of the heroic moment of the nude or clothed body belongs to artistic tradition, and asserts in all its frozen exemplarity the right to disturb the current language with the vigorous celebration of eros."[350]

The recognition given photography, fashion, and other less-often represented forms of art during Celant's tenure, along with the advancements made to the museum structure by the Guggenheim, encouraged a global dialogue among artists and institutions. Yet transformation for the Guggenheim is still constrained by the parameters of the institution's structure. Krens' attempt to expand the contemporary collection by selling three modernist works, for example, was widely condemned for the loss of the paintings from the original collection.[351] For a revolutionary re-envisioning of exhibition and museum structures to occur, a financial force unconstrained by preexisting institutional specifications would be required. Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli are such a force. Founded by Prada and Bertelli in 1993 as PradaMilanoArte and then reorganized in 1995 as the Fondazione Prada, this establishment was initiated by its founders' interest in contemporary art and their desire to have an innovative exhibition space to display such work. Prada and Bertelli's original collection, first located in Milan on Via Spartaco, focused heavily on sculpture and the work of Italian artists produced between 1952 and 1964: Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Alberto Burri, Enrico Castellani, Mario Schifano, and Salvatore Scapritta. Prada and Bertelli perceived the postwar period as an important moment in the history of Italian art, when a powerful new artistic practice was emerging that would

[350] Ibid.
[351] Prud'homme, 36.

influence later generations of Italian artists such as those associated with Arte Povera.[352] The first exhibition of PradaMilanoArte was dedicated to the work of the Italian artist Eliseo Mattiacci. Works chosen for the collection, soon after its initial conception as PradaMilanoArte, were also drawn from the international artistic community, with a focus on artists exploring new forms of artistic research.[353] During the first decade the Foundation supported the work of contemporary artists such as Anish Kapoor, Michael Heizer, Louise Bourgeois, Marc Quinn, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Mariko Mori. The Prada Foundation has played an especially significant role in offering contemporary artists their first shows in Italy. This enlivening new arena for artistic research helps to confirm Italy, and in particular Milan, as a new nexus for innovative contemporary practice.

The conception of the Prada Foundation is representative of a trend among twenty-first-century art establishments. As Celant observes many wealthy art collectors who once bequeathed their collections to museums now build their own museums:

> It used to be that art collectors (Rockefeller, Guggenheim, Panza di Biumo and Lauder) aspired to placing their acquired pieces in museums. Now, they build their own museum (Eli Broad, Dakis Joannou, Pinault, Arnault, Boros and Rubell) and are their own curators, seeking to exalt their own ideas and preferences, leading to a real estate of art. The consequence is that city museums and national museums will suffer a lessening of their economic and patrimonial power until they can no longer survive without the support of private citizens, who will then turn them into an outlet for self-promotion. Trustees will increasingly oblige these museums to accommodate artists who they deem important, delegating to directors and curators the management of the building and the presentation of the selection, which is personal and sometimes devoid of any historical interest.[354]

The objective of the Prada Foundation is to offer more than a personal vision. According to Miuccia Prada, the Foundation is attempting to make advancements by sharing the collection with other art institutions and inviting institutions such as the Hermitage and the Musei Civici di

[352] Germano Celant, *Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2011), 26.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Celant, "Germano Celant: Sharing a Dream," 96.

Venezi to showcase objects in their collection that are often hidden in storerooms and not given as much attention as more canonical works of art.[355] Furthermore, Miuccia Prada has no interest in promoting art divorced from function: "For me, a desire for knowledge lies behind all this. Anything that allows me to understand the past and the present is important… Art for art's sake has no interest; I'm attracted to art because it teaches me about things and the world…."[356]

An aim of the Prada Foundation, according to Celant, is to serve as a "a tool for the production and diffusion of visual experimentations that immediately [takes] on a plural identity open to all linguistic and typological identifications."[357] In the early 2000s the Prada Foundation expanded its interdisciplinary interests by inviting a dialogue with members within the fields of philosophy, science and cinema. In 2003, for example, the Foundation began a long-term collaboration with the University of Vita-Salute San Raffaele in Milan that would support the research of the Philosophy Department and make possible symposia on contemporary issues concerning art and philosophy. Funding for the department's research was intended to encourage intellectual freedom and to forge channels between philosophy and the arts. As Massimo Cacciari, the Head of Faculty at San Raffaele, explained:

> The role of the philosopher is to redirect attention to reality, beyond every prejudice, every preconception […] Our aspiration is to create a community of thinkers free of confessional or ideological labels, creating conditions under which students are an active part of this research community, because they are the unique source of a constant stimulus to renew thought.[358]

The Prada Foundation's goals are closely in-line with Celant's art-historical and curatorial objectives, making his inclusion as the Director of the Foundation in 1995 a logical choice for Prada and Bertelli. The Prada Foundation, in turn, offers Celant an optimal platform

[355] Ibid., 25.
[356] Ibid., 26.
[357] Celant, *Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina*, Introduction; Germano Celant, *Unveiling the Prada Foundation* (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2008), 214.
[358] Celant, *Unveiling the Prada Foundation*, 230.

with which to promote diverse artistic practices that produce socio-critical art. Starting in 1997 the Prada Foundation began to explore site-specific projects within the larger urban environment. An example of this initiative is one of Celant's earliest curatorial projects at the Foundation, Laurie Anderson's 1998 multimedia installation, *Dal Vivo.*[359] The previous year, Anderson conceived a project that would examine interconnected relationships between institutions, technology and the human body. It was Celant who suggested that Anderson bring her project to Milan to create a dialogue between two institutions: the Prada Foundation and the Casa Circondariale-Milano San Vittore prison. Anderson's objective with this work is consistent with Miuccia Prada's commitment to "functional" art-making.[360] In his analysis of Anderson's work, Celant emphasizes how the artist uses art to transform technological tools used to control mass culture into a creative tool that can express the complexities of human existence.[361]

Dal Vivo can be understood as part of Anderson's larger investigation into "…the themes of money and politics, marginalization and lost cultures, the fragmentation of symbolic barriers and the representation of a society in a state of continual self-reformulation, positive and negative, human and technological."[362] For *Dal Vivo* Anderson met with an inmate of the prison, Santino Stefanini, who had served 23 and a half years of his 30-year sentence. As part of the project, Anderson and Celant interviewed Stefanini on multiple occasions. They questioned the inmate not only about his personal history, but also about his mental and sensorial experiences in the penitentiary. These conversations and Stefanini's written account of his experiences were included within the exhibition catalogue. Stefanini, who was serving time for aggravated murder and robbery, had been in and out of prison since his youth. His personal story of violence, drugs,

[359] Celant and Anderson co-curated this exhibition.
[360] Germano Celant, *Dal Vivo* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 1998), preface.
[361] Ibid., 23.
[362] Ibid., 15.

and gang activity is interwoven with the larger political and social unrest during the decade of the 1970s known as the "years of lead" (*anni di piombo*) occurring across the Italian nation. During his incarceration, in order to alleviate the isolating experience of prison, Stefanini studied for and gained two professional diplomas and wrote two collections of poetry.

The *Dal Vivo* installation was divided into three parts within the Foundation. Viewers were first led "through the graphic space of one wing of the San Vittore prison."[363] After passing through a narrow hallway viewers entered a large, darkened rectangular room, the floor of which was covered in black sand. All that was illuminated were fifteen small cast statues made of resin onto which Anderson's image was projected. Each of the statues emitted an audio recording of Anderson continuously narrating five stories that were developed for *Dal Vivo.* The voices of the statues join in a chorus that fills the room with continuous sound that is evocative of the cacophony of the actual prison.[364] The ambiance of this space contrasted with the final darkened room in which a three-dimensional life-size cast of Stefanini's body was placed, seated silently [fig. 30]. Similar to the little statues, a projection of Stefanini's visage overlapped on the blank cast [fig. 31]. Unlike the other statues, a live telematics transmission of Stefanini sitting in the San Vittore prison was projected three times a day for a total of fifteen minutes for the duration of the exhibition.[365] Stefanini agreed to participate in the project in order to experience in some form an escape from the solitude of his confinement. This "escape" was performed virtually.[366] Anderson's intention with this project was to:

> …create a magical quality in the body of a person whose existential value is unknown to me or is strongly connoted but impenetrable. He is an alien who has been imprisoned and isolated in a penitentiary for a very long period of time. Through my work, I am

[363] Ibid., 16.
[364] Ibid., 25.
[365] "Press release," Fondazione Prada, last modified June 12, 1998, http://fondazioneprada.org/en/comunicati/LA.ENG.pdf.
[366] Celant, *Dal Vivo*, 31.

> endeavoring to 'bring him down to earth,' that is, I want to take him to my territory, the territory of art. It's a bit like that ray of sunlight that suddenly lights up the outcasts in 'Miracle in Milan' or E.T.'s spaceship. So the image of the imprisoned Santino Stefanini undergoes the same process. It 'lands' in the Fondazione and negates the distance between that place and the prison. It is made of light. Like the sun and the outline of the spaceship. It disorients and reunites two universes which seem distant and inaccessible.[367]

Even though Stefanini is an illusion, his appearance provokes viewers to reflect upon his confined existence separate from the "freedoms" of everyday life. He is captured not only by the prison system, but also through technology that transmits his immobile image to a frozen replica housed in the Prada Foundation.[368] This transference of Stefanini from one institution to the next also can be related to the duality of our physical identity and the existence of the mind. Although Stefanini's movement is confined, he is able to maintain vitality by transporting himself cerebrally through the artistic language of poetry.

The desire to support contemporary art and to explore new avenues of artistic research, such as Anderson's *Dal Vivo,* makes locating the Prada Foundation activities in significant international cultural centers an obvious decision. Currently the Prada Foundation has satellites in New York, California, Tokyo, Venice and Milan. Part of the goal of the Prada Foundation is also to utilize locations in Italy to show "and confirm an image that is characteristic of how culture is treated in Italy – integration of the ancient, modern and contemporary to create an environmental and temporal link over centuries, with activities that bring together history and experimentation, and architectural spaces that shift between the eighteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries."[369]

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[367] "Press release," Fondazione Prada, last modified June 12, 1998, http://fondazioneprada.org/en/comunicati/LA.ENG.pdf
[368] Celant, *Dal Vivo*, 21-23.
[369] Celant, *Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina*, 59.

In 2008, fifteen years after it had begun, the Prada Foundation began the development of a new center of operations that would allow for the collection to expand, include a new auditorium for performances and symposia, and to establish a space for a permanent collection. The site chosen was in the south of Milan in an early twentieth-century industrial site, Largo Isarco, that was renovated and expanded by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA).[370] The project incorporated the original modern industrial buildings from the 1910s into the contemporary design, weaving the historic site into the present-day environment [fig. 32]. [371]

The space of the Largo Isarco compound is distinct from traditional exhibition spaces such as the white gallery cube, gutted industrial warehouse, or the contemporary art museum, which Koolhaus refers to as a "barely disguised version of the department store."[372] The enormous expanse of the compound allows for a variety of spaces dedicated to features such as galleries for a permanent collection, room for performances, rotating exhibitions and other events, the Prada and Luna Rossa archives, offices, and storage spaces that allow artworks to be either stored or be placed partially on display to the public. The new compound also includes the typical café and gift shop associated with museums because visitors are accustomed to associating the gallery experience with the shopping and dining experience. These facilities, however, have been relegated to the perimeter of the compound and close to city life in order to keep them at a far distance from artistic events, the main focus of the Foundation. In addition to Laurie Anderson's *Dal Vivo*, it is planned that this site will display works in the future by

[370] The new site offers 17,000 square meters of floor space.
[371] Celant, *Unveiling the Prada Foundation*, 5.
[372] Ibid., 23.

innovative contemporary artists such as Damien Hirst, Anish Kapoor, Mariko Mori, and Carsten Höller.

Perhaps one of the most relevant examples of an artist whose working practice coincides with the goals of Celant and the Prada Foundation is the contemporary Belgium artist Carsten Höller. Höller has been associated with the term "Relational Aesthetics," coined by Nicolas Bourriaud to describe artists who seek to create art intended for a wide audience and that actively engages them as participants. These artists create art that responds to the growing isolation between individuals within a consumer-driven society by creating works (installations, performances, and laboratory experiments) that open up lines of communication, generate relationships and create spaces in which to encounter ideas, objects, people and other experiences. Recalling the early twentieth-century historic-avant-garde, these artists seek to discover and announce what a future world might be by creating works that literally formulate such possibilities. Yet, unlike the historic-avant-garde artists, an artist such as Höller does not subscribe to a utopian subversion of art into life.[373] Höller, instead, produces vibrant artistic experiences that allow for art and life to intertwine, yet remain distinct. Höller is an artist who often chooses to work outside the parameters of the museum and gallery or if he does work within these environments, he reinvents the space in such a manner as to strip the demands and common associations made with the institutional space.

In 2000, Celant curated a series of installation projects created by Höller entitled *Synchro System*. This show illustrates Höller's aim to directly involve viewers as active participants within his work by creating an environment which raises questions and provokes awareness through the viewers' experience of the space. The exhibition consisted of various rooms, each

[373] Daniel Birnbaum, "Turning Tables," *Artforum International* 47, no. 8 (April 2009), 85.

filled with an installation that altered the spectators' understanding of the environment and their own physical sensory experience. With each installation participants progressed further into a hallucinatory space and were at times forced to directly engage with the space if they wanted to continue through the exhibition. In one installation, *Gantenbein Corridor* [fig. 33],[374] reminiscent of Pier Paolo Calzolari's *Il Filtro* from 1967 [fig. 15], the viewer walks through an approximately 98-foot enclosed corridor that gradually transitioned from full light to near darkness and then returned to full light. As with Calzolari's work, Höller's hallway engages the participants sensorially by depriving them of their sight and heightening their other senses. In another installation for this exhibition that dealt with light, *Light Wall*, the artist covered the expanse of approximately 62 feet by 14 feet with incandescent 25 watt light bulbs [fig. 34]. The flashing of the lights was synchronized to affect brain activity and cause visual hallucinations. In addition, pulsing sounds corresponding with the flashing of the lights filled the installation space. A third installation, *Upside-Down Mushroom Room* [fig. 35], consisted of twelve enormous replicas of the highly poisonous and hallucinatory-inducing *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, ranging in size from 65 centimeters to 10 feet. Heightening the *Alice in Wonderland*-like atmosphere, the room appeared overturned by locating the incandescent lights on the floor of the space and the enormous mushrooms hanging upside-down from the ceiling. To enhance the hallucinatory effect, the tops of the mushrooms spun at varying speeds.

Partially funded by the Prada Foundation, a second artistic project created by Höller, *The Double Club*, merged music, dance, food, and the visual arts into an event that lasted from November 2008 to July 2009 [fig. 36]. The space not only interwove a variety of artistic languages, it also grafted two cultures, the Congolese and Western, into one space. This project

[374] Gantenbein is a fictional character who pretends to be blind in Max Frisch's novel, *Mein Name sei Gantenbein.*

traversed artistic languages, cultures, and time and its realization depended upon more than the work of a single artist; the artistic experience relied on the support of the musicians, restaurant and bar staff and architects and designers who helped to refurbish the club's structure as well as the numerous partakers of the club. Höller's *Double Club* (as the title suggests) strives not to merge Western and Congolese cultures into a univocal, homogenous blend, but instead seeks to present the two cultures simultaneously, to be entered into as a mutual dialogue which has the potential to create new aesthetic expressions and actions. The impetus behind this installation came from Höller's passion for Congolese culture, in particular Sapeur culture, and his dissatisfaction with the current, commonplace clubbing experience.[375]

From 1870 to 1960 the Belgian government controlled the Republic of the Congo, bringing industrialization, economic reform and improved health care as well as destruction of the inhabitant's culture. After regaining their independence, the Republic of Congo, then called Zaire, was controlled by the authoritarian president Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, who was supported by the governments of Belgium and the United States of America. As part of the de-colonization plan, Mobutu developed a new nationalist ideology that was referred to as "authenticity" or "Mobutism," which suppressed the incorporation of Western culture, such as the use of Western names, Christianity, and fashion trends, into the Congolese culture. [376] This suppression led to the formation of the La SAPE social movement.[377] Members of La SAPE, known as Sapeurs, adopt the fashion trends of Japan and America and consider themselves experts on fashion and music.[378]

[375] Birnbaum, "Turning Tables," 2.
[376] Ch. Didier Gondola, *The History of the Congo* (CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 142.
[377] SAPE stands for Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Elegantes.
[378] Carsten Höller, *The Double Club* (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2011), 2. "Sapeur" is a term derived from the French "se saper," "to dress elegantly."

The original name of Höller's club, the "Prada Congo Club" was changed to "The Double Club" because of the strife occurring during 2008 in the Congo. The rebel General Laurent Knunda attempted to capture the city of Goma, a campaign that resulted in much causality and displaced millions. On the opening week of *The Double Club*, the United Nation announced that it would send 3,000 more troops to assist the Congolese in addition to the 17,000 UN peacekeepers already there. In response, the profits of *The Double Club* were donated to the UNICEF charity City of Joy.[379] Höller preferred the original title because the juxtaposition of the names "Prada" and "Congo" raised questions about two very different states of reality: the production and consumption of luxury goods versus the brutal crisis occurring within a nation.[380]

After some deliberation Höller decided to locate *The Double Club,* comprised of a bar, restaurant and discotheque, in a refurbished Victorian warehouse in London. The decision to locate his installation within the city of London was inspired by the city's rich tradition of clubs, music, nightlife and fashion. *The Double Club* bar and restaurant offered both Congolese and Western food and drink. The spaces of the bar, restaurant and dance floor were divided by distinct Congolese and Western aesthetics. The Congolese half of the space had the appearance of a rough shack filled with colored lights, white plastic furniture, a brick wall partially painted with a Primus Bière advertisement, "dictator kitsch" furniture, and a television showing clips of Congolese musicians whose songs were out of sync with the music being played. The Western half of the club included a high performance speaker system, décor that referenced the 1920s and 1960s along with contemporary furniture and decorations that followed a black-and-white color scheme.[381] The central location of the dance floor, a stainless steel-covered circle designed by

[379] Jennifer Allen, "The Double Club," *Frieze Blog* (November 25 2008), http://blog.frieze.com/the_double_club/.
[380] Höller, "January 14th interview," *The Double Club* (Milan: Progetto Prada Arte, 2011), *n.p.*
[381] Höller, *The Double Club*, 3.

Höller, slowly rotated during the night, offered visitors a place to dance, mingle, and listen to alternating stylings of Congolese and Western music. The only marked difference within the audio arrangement was the use of two different sound systems, which afforded the Congolese side of the club a different resonance than the Western side. Both music and dance, two vital art forms that encourage communal celebration, reflected the success and strain of Höller's project. Höller originally intended to invite musicians from the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinshasa, but was blocked by the anti-Congolese government group, Combattants de Londres, who prevent Congolese musicians from playing in Europe, which they believe supports the government.[382] Despite this setback, *The Double Club* successfully created an influential environment that destabilized participants' expectations of an artwork, a club and a culture.

After its six-month stint, *The Double Club* was dismantled, parts were destroyed and the rest placed into cargo boxes. Elements of *The Double Club* were soon relocated to the second floor in the latest Prada Foundation location opened in 2011, a site on the Grand Canal in Venice in the historic palazzo called Ca' Corner della Regina. This site is of historical significance for once housing the Venice Biennale's Historical Archives of Contemporary Art, but this history was not the driving force behind the selection of the building. According to Prada and Bertelli, they were more interested in the day-to-day lived history of the space and its humanity.[383] The restoration of this site was conducted to allow the historic eighteenth-century building to contribute its voice to the exhibition space. The rich layers of activities that accrued over time and left their mark upon the structure are intermingled into its current hub of activity to enrich and animate the present moment. This is yet another project that Celant has been associated with

[382] Jennifer Allen, "The Double Club," n.p. Instead, Höller invited London-based Congolese musicians to perform at the club.
[383] Celant, *Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina*, 23-24.

that attempts to return Italian cultural heritage to a place of contemporary significance within the larger art world,[384] and that aides in the restoration of historical sites in Italy through the infusion of art installations and institutions. This structure is the latest effort by the Prada Foundation to rethink exhibition space in order to provide the means for a range of artistic productions that break free of a prescribed order and to allow artists to create their works as "co-producers of a project they had always 'dreamed' of creating."[385]

Celant's positions at the Prada Foundation and the Guggenheim Museum have enabled him to carry out large-scale exhibitions of new or little-known artworks and to further his interests in supporting critical artists, re-conceptualizing exhibition practices, and enabling diverse artistic languages to be expressed in large art venues. Furthermore, these opportunities have provided the means to develop and distinguish his career as a contemporary art historian. Though holding high-profile positions that placed him at the center of institutional systems, Celant still considers himself an independent curator and art historian and has attempted to undermine the homogenizing effects of museums by curating radical, provocative exhibitions and promoting significant, thought-provoking avant-garde artists.

Among his freelance projects, Celant curated Florence's first biennale in 1996 and the 47th Venice Biennale in 1994. In 2004 he served as the artistic supervisor for Genoa's year as European Capital of Culture, for which he organized the exhibition "Architecture & Arts, 1900/2004." These exhibitions resonated closely with Celant's established curatorial interests: the Venice Biennale's theme was "Future Present Past," suggesting a temporal fluidity in which the future contains both the past and present intertwined, and "Architecture & Arts, 1900/2004," which focused on "architecture and its inroads into the various and sundry artistic expressions of

[384] Ibid.
[385] Ibid., 190.

the twentieth century and of today, to its 'contamination' by and osmotic absorption of the languages of paintings, sculpture, literature, photography and cinema."[386] In 2014 Celant curated his first exhibition in India, "Everything is Inside," a survey of the Indian artist Subodh Gupta's work, which was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. As with many of Celant's curatorial projects, he chose to draw upon the architectural environment of the exhibition space, in this case the Jaipur House, once home to the Maharaja of Jaipur in the early twentieth century, to create a layered dialogue between viewers and the artistic objects as well as between the works and the physical context bound to the location.[387] Celant's interest in the collapsing of time within the present moment, the merging of artistic languages and the important role the cultural-historic environment plays in the exhibition space is tied to a unique area of curatorial research called exhibition reenactment, which Celant has investigated since the 1970s and which is discussed in an in-depth analysis in the following chapter.

[386] Giuseppe Pericu, *Architecture & Arts 1900/2004* (Milan: Skira Editore, 2004), n.p.
[387] Germano Celant, interview with author, November 18, 2013; "Subodh Gupta," *Wall Street International* (October 28, 2013), http://wsimag.com/art/5832-subodh-gupta-everything-is-inside, accessed October 8, 2014.

CHAPTER FIVE

REENACTMENT/REINVENTION: CURATING ANACHRONIC EXHIBITIONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, reenactments of past historic- and neo-avant-garde performances, installations and exhibitions have occurred more regularly within museum and gallery spaces.[388] These typically ephemeral art works have in the past been studied and understood through written sources and photographic documentation, yet the current interest in these "lost" works and actions has encouraged scholars to rethink how these objects and events might be better understood in the manner in which they were originally intended to be experienced. Celant has been a leader in this field of research since his 1976 "Ambiente/arte dal futurismo alla body art" exhibition for the 37th Venice Biennale. Not satisfied with recalling past exhibitions and installations through fragmented accounts collected in documents, Celant has helped to rethink ways in which these pivotal, influential works and events could be revisited and directly experienced once again by new and old audiences, offering viewers a chance to be physically immersed within artistic environments and to experience to a certain extent the spirit and radicality of the installations and environments of the early twentieth-century historic-avant-garde and the mid-twentieth-century neo-avant-garde.

Celant's primary curatorial interests have remained steadfast since his early work with Arte Povera artists. In his numerous curatorial projects since the late 1960s Celant has worked with artists to create environments in which their work, no matter its form, creates a dialogue within the installation space. This dialogue involves the objects, the space, the transition of time, and the participating viewers. It emerges from the visual energy stimulated by the objects, the

[388] The terms "historic-avant-garde" and "neo-avant-garde" are adopted from Peter Bürger's *Theory of the avant-garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

viewers' interaction with the objects, the history of the space, and the viewer's personal memories and ideas. Celant's approach to these curatorial projects draws from his "baroque vision" developed during his studies with Eugenio Battisti. The art object's existence within the present moment as it transitions from past to future, its dialogue with the surrounding environment and the interplay between artistic languages are all elements of a "baroque vision." Through this lens, Celant attempts to understand and envision museum and gallery exhibitions within a broader scope that steps back from classifications of a singular style or isolated objects. Instead Celant explores the relationships between a variety of objects in space and time as well as the human relationships entwined with the objects' stories. Celant is not interested in just displaying objects before an audience, but in creating immersive environments that speak to the larger cultural context of the past and present moments. This interest extends beyond an examination of historical context to include the diverse relationships forged between objects and the *in situ* environment of the museum space.[389] Celant's approach to staging exhibitions is closely tied to his continued attraction to theater, which stems back to his early interest in the work of Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theater," his friendship with the performers of The Living Theater who spent time in Genoa during the early 1960s and the theatricality found in seventeenth-century baroque creations.[390]

A discussion of three of Celant's most notable projects that deal with the themes of historical return and reenactment will explicate Celant's contribution to the history of exhibition making. After discussing various examples of exhibition reenactments, including one of the

[389] Germano Celant, *Arte povera: history and stories* (Milan: Electa, 2011), 281.
[390] Germano Celant, interview with author, November 18, 2013. The Living Theatre is an experimental theater group founded in New York City in 1947. In the 1960s the troupe became nomadic and travelled internationally. These artists sought to reconceptualize theater by inviting the audience to directly participate in performances, thus turning theater into a collaborative event that incorporated the nonfictional world into the performance with the goal of promoting social change. "History," *The Living Theater*, http://www.livingtheatre.org/about/history, accessed October 19th, 2014.

earliest productions, Celant's 1976 Venice Biennale "Ambiente/arte" exhibition, and methods of understanding this new exhibition genre, this examination will consider Celant's restaging of Harald Szeemann's 1969 exhibition "When Attitude Becomes Form" originally shown in the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland and later restaged at the Prada Foundation's Venetian palazzo Ca' Corner della Regina during the 2013 Venice Biennale. Celant's third major return to Arte Povera for his groundbreaking series of exhibitions held across Italy, "Arte Povera 2011," will also be discussed.

The developing interest in the field of exhibition reenactment in the twenty-first century can be traced through the growing number of publications on the topic. In the introduction to *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*, curator Florence Derieux argues: "It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the twentieth century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions. However, this critical history still largely remains to be written. The question becomes all the more pressing as this history coincides with the appearance of a new professional category, that of the curator."[391] Supporting this statement in her review of "Exhibiting the New Art 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969," Lisa Le Feuvre, a curator at the Henry Moore Institute, claims that in the twenty-first century it is now crucial for a full understanding of an artwork to know its reception as well as the exhibitions in which it is shown.[392] Similarly, Celant affirms that the necessity to understand the entire context of a work: "...meaning is entrusted not only to the isolated work, but to the dialogue and connection that, in mounting the exhibition, are sought and constructed with the other works

[391] Florence Derieux, "Introduction," *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zurich: JRP-Ringier Kunstverlag AG, 2007), 8.
[392]Lisa Lefeuvre, "Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969," *Art Monthly* 347 (June 2011): 35.

present in the specific space."[393] Although reenactment within the visual art world has become much more common and accepted by many curators and viewers in the twenty-first century, this was not always the case. One of the earliest attempts by a curator to recreate a previous exhibition on a large scale was Celant's 1976 "Ambiente/arte." Reflecting upon his experience with restagings over the years Celant recalls:

> …historians, scholars and museum directors criticized me for re-creating environments, almost as if it were a crime against the originals. Today we understand that re-proposing a situation and a relationship among the things of art is a way to communicate a history that has determined the events of the past fifty years, but has been lost in terms of experience. My critical and historical contribution lies in the ongoing proposal of this 'contextual' subject, which is both architectural and relational, connecting art objects with another language or territory.[394]

With the theme of the 37th Venice Biennale centered on the "environment," directors Pontus Hulten and Vittorio Gregotti approached Celant to curate an exhibition at the Central Pavilion. For the "Ambiente/arte" exhibit Celant reconstructed either full-scale replicas or model versions of previous installation environments. While acknowledging the diversity of environmental and installation art, Celant focused this exhibition on artistic installations that engaged interior spaces. Within twenty galleries Celant recreated a series of artistic environments spanning from early-twentieth century works produced by historical avant-garde groups to the diverse artistic practices occurring in 1976. The opening gallery contained works by Futurist artists such as Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero as well as the work of Russian Constructivists, including El Lissitsky's *Proun Space* [fig. 37] and Vladimir Tatlin's *Corner Reliefs* (1915) [fig. 38].[395] This space introduced visitors to the foundations of modernist environments that influenced the neo-avant-garde artists working in the 1950s and 60s. The following two galleries also contained works from the first half of the twentieth century,

[393] Erik Verhagen, "Germano Celant, When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013," *artpress*, no. 401 (June 2013): 39.
[394] Verhagen, 41.
[395] This gallery also included the works of Ivo Pannaggi, Ivan Puni, and Filippo de Pisis.

including installations such as Wassily Kandinsky's *Music Room* (1922) [fig. 39] and Theo van Doesburg's *Café Aubette* [fig. 40].[396] Among the installations housed in the fourth, fifth and sixth galleries were works by a variety of artists working in the 1940s through the 1960s, which included restagings of three Surrealist exhibitions (1938/1942/1947); Yves Klein's *Immaterial Space* (1961) [fig. 41]; Lucio Fontana's *Ambiente spaziale* (1961) [fig. 42]; Arman's *Le Plein* (1960) [fig. 43] and Allan Kaprow's *Yard* (1961) [fig. 44].[397] In the fourth gallery was a space for Jackson Pollock's paintings. In this instance Celant had Pollock's painting, *One, number 31* (1950) [fig. 45] reproduced to scale and laid on the floor in the manner in which Pollock had created it. Along the walls were six enlarged photographic reproductions of Hans Namuth's photographs documenting Pollock at work. In the other thirteen rooms Celant presented individual installations by contemporary artists, many of which had been created specifically for the pavilion at Celant's invitation, with the intention of having the works interact with the pavilion's architecture. For example, Daniel Buren's *14 windows minus one* consisted of the artist covering the exterior of thirteen skylights with white sheets decorated with his iconic stripes in white that were revealed when the sun shone through the fabric [fig. 46].[398] Another work that had been previously installed elsewhere and restaged for this exhibit was Jannis Kounellis' *Untitled* (*12 Cavalli*) from 1969, which tethered twelve live horses to the walls of the gallery space [fig. 47]. Celant's juxtaposition of modernist avant-garde environments with installations from the 1960s thus provided the opportunity to examine the development of

[396] Other works included in this gallery were by Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, Erich Burchartz, Vilmos Huszar, Sophie Tauber-Arp, Oskar Schlemmer, Jean Gorin, and Wladyslaw Strzeminski.
[397] Other artist's installations in the fourth gallery were by Jean Arp, Mario Radice, Alberto Sartoris, Jean Gorin, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Jackson Pollock, Lucio Fontana, Pinot Gallizio, Yves Klein and Allan Kaprow. In the fifth gallery were: Louise Nevelson, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Arman, George Segal, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Ben and Robert Watts. In the sixth gallery were works by Christo, Claes Oldenburg, Giulio Paolini, Gianni Colombo, Carolee Schneemann, Carla Accardi, Andy Warhol and Michelangelo Pistoletto.
[398] Other individual installations included works by Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Michel Asher, Blinky Palermo, Joseph Beuys, Mario Merz, Vito Acconci, Robert Irwin, Maria Nordman, Douglas Wheeler, and Michael Asher.

environmental art. Celant's layout of these installations followed a chronological orientation that allowed viewers to see the foundations of installation art set within the early twentieth-century and trace the development of this research within the later work of 1960s and 1970s artists.

In his essay for the 1976 Venice Biennale catalogue Celant outlined his motivation for creating this exhibition. He recognized that one could trace throughout the history of art the artist's attention to the relationship between the artistic object and the environment in which it was shown, but Celant located a definitive change in the mentality of artists at the turn of the twentieth century, signaled by the work of the Italian Futurists. These politically motivated artists sought to bring art and life closer together by breaking down the established hierarchy of art forms and approaching the lived environment as an artistic space of exploration.[399] In a similar vein other historic-avant-garde artists associated with Russian Constructivism, De Stijl and Dada endeavored in their socio-critical agendas to open the artistic sphere to the larger general public. Celant's project sought to counter the indifference by art institutions to early installation works that were destroyed and poorly documented by reconstructing these works and re-examining their importance. His objective with this exhibition was to recognize the significance of the larger environmental context within which art works were involved and to demonstrate the continued commitment by avant-garde artists' to engage with surrounding environments.[400]

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[399] Germano Celant, *Ambiente/arte dal futurismo alla body art* (Venezia: La biennale di Venezia, 1977), 193.

[400] "Ambiente/arte" received mixed reviews. Simon Wilson described the show as a "fascinating historical survey of [an] increasingly important tradition in modern art" and Henry Martin said that Celant's show offered the most clarity and coherence of all the exhibits. James Fitzsimmons, on the other hand, found the exhibit ill-conceived, cliché-ridden and devoted to pseudo-problems: "One may hope that this fad may be nearing its end, and that soon artists in Europe will follows the example of American artists, and of the more serious, intellectually sophisticated members of the European art community, and will return singly to their studios to make paintings, sculptures, and prints, instead of engaging in gang shag attacks on the Muses, tinkering with the environment, or trying as amateur sociologies to change the world - something art has never done, at least not since artists gave up their hierophantic functions, when in building cathedrals, discovering eidetic symbols for the mysteries, painting yantras, sculpting

It was over a decade after "Ambiente/arte" that the field of reenactment within the visual arts began to be charted by art history scholars. While scholars of installation and performance art began to grapple with questions related to reenactments of these art forms in the 1990s,[401] the history of exhibition reenactment remained largely unexplored territory until recently. One scholar to address the developing field of exhibition reenactment and the increased interest in the history of exhibitions is the art historian Reesa Greenberg, whose essay "'Remembering Exhibitions': From Point to Line to Web" questions the traditional understanding of exhibitions as events that existed only in one historical moment. Greenberg uses the term "remembering exhibitions" to describe this new type of exhibition genre that reflects upon past exhibitions:

> How we remember exhibitions and our need to remember them are very much part of recent exhibition culture. 'Remembering exhibitions' …attest to a belief in a dynamic, rhizome-like notion of history where past and present are interwoven. As such, 'remembering exhibitions' belong to the practice of spatializing memory, making memory concrete, tangible, actual and interactive. 'Remembering exhibitions' can be discursive events, dynamic cultural moments of active, widespread exchange and debate that in turn are catalysts for changing perceptions and practices. They have the potential for altering past and future views of the exhibition condition.[402]

An overview of some of the large-scale exhibition reenactments reveals the difficulty in such undertakings as well as the diversity of these projects. An early exhibition reenactment was carried out in 1991 by curator Stephanie Barron for the exhibition "Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant Garde in Nazi Germany," which inserted within the contemporary exhibit a free-standing corridor on a raised floor that suggested the ambiance of the original "Degenerate Art" exhibition of 1937. In 1992 the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History staged "Gutai

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effigies of the gods, and the like, they did make a social contribution, along with the philosophers, poets, seers and priests." Simon Wilson, "The Venice Biennale," *The Burlington Magazine* 118, no. 883 (October 1976): 723; Henry Martin, "The 37th Venice Biennale: "the show's the thing," *Art International* 20 (1976): 19; and James Fitzsimmons, "The 1976 Venice Biennale: A Dissenting Opinion," *Art International* 20, no. 7/8 (September 1976): 60.

[401] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011): 3

[402] Reesa Greenberg, "'Remembering Exhibitions': From Point to Line to Web," *Tate's Online Research Journal* (Autumn 2009), http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7264, accessed March 20, 2014.

Exhibition 1-2-3," recreating the multiple Gutai exhibitions that had occurred in Ashiya Park in the mid-1950s. Also in 1992 the curator Marcel Fleiss restaged a 1988 exhibition, "Works-Concepts-Situations-Information," originally curated by Bob Nickas and inspired by Szeemann's 1969 exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information." Szeemann's show was also restaged by the curator Jens Hoffmann in 2012 at the Watts Institute of Contemporary Art in San Francisco. In 2009 the Tate Modern reconstructed the exhibition of Robert Morris' 1971 "Bodypsacemotionthings." The New York gallery Zwirner & Wirth in 2008 restaged in nearly identical form the Green Gallery's 1964 exhibition of an immersive environment installation of Dan Flavin's fluorescent lights. The well-known "Pictures" exhibition presented by the non-profit foundation Artists Space and curated by art historian Douglas Crimp in 1997, which ushered in a generation of emerging artists working in appropriation art, was restaged by Artists Space once again in 2001. In 2010 the Kunsthaus in Zurich, under the curatorial direction of Wilhelm Wartmann, recreated their 1932 retrospective show of Pablo Picasso's work in celebration of the museum's centennial. In 1932 the exhibition was radical as a retrospective show of a living artist, for being the first retrospective show of Picasso's career and for allowing the artist direct involvement in organizing the show.[403]

Yet in the majority of these examples, the restagings were not capable of taking the reinstallation of the past exhibition to a truly all-encompassing reenactment of the past.[404] The reconstruction of the "Degenerate Art" show offered only a spliced interpretation of the original

[403] Tobia Bezzola, Pablo Picasso, Simonetta Fraquelli, Christian Geelhaar, and Michael C. FitzGerald, *Picasso by Picasso: his first museum exhibition 1932* (Zürich: Kunsthaus Zürich, 2010), 13.
[404] *Gutai Exhibition 1-2-3*, for example, was able to present many of the original works, while others had to be re-created.

exhibition.[405] The Kunsthaus in Zurich was able to display less than a third of the original 225 works for the Picasso retrospective because of difficulty in securing all the originals and the original layout for the 1932 exhibit could not be repeated.[406] Similarly for the remake of "Pictures," only some of the original works could be located and so the 2001 exhibition consisted of a combination of works shown in the original exhibit, new works produced by artists who had shown work in the original exhibition, and other new works by emerging artists not associated with the show, but who stylistically shared similarities with the earlier generation.[407] Like the restaging of "Pictures," which opted to create an exhibit that demonstrated the influence of one generation's work upon a future generation, Bob Nickas' "Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information" exhibition included artists' works from the 1960s juxtaposed with works produced in the 1980s. Although Nickas sought to show how later generations of artists were influenced by the work produced during the 1960s epitomized by Szeemann's exhibit, the only direct ties to Szeemann's show were Nickas' appropriation of its subtitle and the inclusion of one work by Bruce Nauman as representative of the earlier show. The majority of works presented were by 1980s artists such as Alan Belcher, Cady Noland and Steve Parrino.[408] Similarly, Hoffmann's restaging at the Watts Institute was less of a reenactment than an homage to Szeemann's "When Attitudes Become Form." Like Nickas, Hoffmann's exhibition consisted primarily of new works by twenty-first-century artists who were influenced by the artistic precedents set by the artists exhibited in "When Attitudes Become Form." Juxtaposed with these new works were documents and historical artifacts from the original show. Hoffman described

[405] Stephanie Barron also curated in a similar format the 1997 exhibit *Exiles and Émigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, which also reconstructed models of original gallery spaces in the 1942 exhibition *Art of this Century* (Greenberg, 2009).
[406]Francesco Stocchi, "Every Critical Act is a Creative Act," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 446-7.
[407]Stocchi, 448.
[408] Stocchi, 449.

the show as a partial remake of the previous show, a rejuvenation of the thoughts and ideas of the past and a rebellion against the state of exhibition-making in the twenty-first century that is constrained by bureaucracy and regulations.[409] The 2009 reconstruction of Morris' "Bodypsacemotionthings," which was originally shut down after only four days due to the Tate Modern's director Norman Reid's concern over possible injuries being sustained, did not allow for the same freedom of the first staging. This innovative exhibition originally consisted of an installation of plywood structures such as slides, seesaws and gigantic cylinders, a tightrope and enormous balls that allowed participants to physically engage in numerous immersive activities with the objects. Though attendees could engage with the objects in the 2009 restaging, the spontaneous free-for-all of the original exhibition was lost through the presence of numerous guards monitoring activity and by the long queues of onlookers clamoring for their brief turn to interact with an object.[410] Whether attempting to recreate the original exhibition or drawing inspiration from the original to create a variation of the exhibition, these examples provide an introduction to the complexities of carrying out exhibition reenactments.[411]

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[409] Jens Hoffmann, "Attitude Problems," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 491.

[410]The restaging of Morris' "Bodyspacemotionthings" was held during the Long Weekend festival that included numerous other interactive-art activities. Among them was Michelangelo Pistoletto performing once again his action of rolling *Mappamondo*. In this instance Pistoletto rolled the newspaper ball along the Millennium Bridge one evening. Afterwards he posed for a photo-shoot. The *Telegraph* reporter Mark Hudson present for the evening's events critiqued the artificial illusion theses remakes suggested of offering the public the same participatory art of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In regard to Pistoletto's participation, Hudson remarked: "He may have been an anti-capitalist conceptualist appearing at an event designed to empower the creativity of the man in the street, but at that moment he embodied the idea of the artist as a unique, magician-like being in a way that felt very traditional." (Mark Hudson, "Robert Morris' 'Bodyspacemotionthings' at the Tate Modern, review," *The Telegraph (*May 26 2009), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/5386206/Robert-Morris-Bodyspacemotionthings-at-the-Tate-Modern-review.html, accessed May 3, 2014.)

[411] In her essay Greenberg distinguishes 'remembering exhibitions' into three categories: the replica, the riff and the reprise. The replica is an exhibition that attempts for the most part to recreate the original exhibition (either with original works or replicas). The riff is an exhibition that does not attempt to replicate the original exhibition, but instead recognizes the importance of the original to history and draws from it as a source of inspiration (sometimes incorporating a few of the original works as reference). While these categories are accurate, I have chosen to summarize the first two together in one overview and discuss the third, the reprise, separately. The reprise is a

The central dilemmas of reenactment, whether in recreating a performance or restaging an exhibition, are shared. Both rely on documentation, such as photographs, video, interviews with people present at the original event, and other written sources that capture essential elements of the historical occurrence. These elements offer only versions and moments of time and fail to provide a complete picture, yet are necessary tools in recovering the past. Art historians working in many fields have raised concerns over the use, value and interpretation of archival documentation, but questions raised by performance art scholars are especially germane in this context. In "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," art historian Amelia Jones addressed the question of scholars' abilities to fully understand past events through documentation, arguing that being present at the original occurrence does not necessarily provide the scholar with a better understanding of the event than a scholar utilizing archival material. Both instances involve a mediated relationship and the exchange between a scholar and a document is as inter-subjective as one between two people.[412] In "Performance and Its Objects," art historian Kristine Stiles pointed out the risk of scholars misreading the past by placing too much faith in archival documentation's ability to "truthfully" represent past events. Stiles points to the case of art historian Henry Sayre who discussed in his book *The Object of Performance* (1989) the photographs said to document Austrian performance artist Rudolf Schwarzkogler's suicide through the act of self-mutilating his penis with a razorblade in 1966. This act of mutilation did not, in fact, lead to the artist's death nor were the photographs even of Schwarzkogler, but of the artist Heinz Cibulka who posed as Schwarkogler [fig. 48].[413] All forms of archival documentation, whether written, oral or a physical object, have the potential to lead to

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"remembering exhibition' created by a museum that utilizes the Web to document past and current exhibitions in order to create a more active and extensive archive of these works.

[412] Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter, 1997): 12.

[413] Kristine Stiles, "Performance and Its Objects," *Arts Magazine* 65, no. 3 (November 1990).

a misinterpretation of the past as well as offering scholarly insights. What was not documented can be equally as telling as the manner in which the artistic event was chronicled. In the instance of Schwarzkogler, who committed suicide by jumping from his apartment window, the artist was inspired by a performance of Yves Klein who photographically documented his own dive into space in *Leap into the Void* (1960) [fig. 49]. Klein's image was a photomontage produced by Harry Shunk and János Kender that omitted the presence of a group of men holding a tarpaulin to catch Klein's fall. Like Klein, many performance artists have carefully crafted their artistic personas through documentation of their work.[414] The act of documentation is itself a performance as well as the later examination and analysis of the documents.[415]

A central issue concerning the reenactment of past production is fidelity: any recreation will be unable to exactly repeat the original and will therefore inaccurately represent the past and potentially distort the intentions and spirit of the original. This fact raises questions centered on the relevancy and legitimacy behind restaging the events in the first place. An exhibition reenactment that self-consciously confronted these questions was Celant's 2013 restaging of Szeemann's 1969 "When Attitudes Become Form" for the Prada Foundation, which has been, to date, one of the most thorough, large-scale and radical exhibition reenactments in the twenty-first century. Although research on exhibition reenactment is relatively new, the discourse developed in performance art scholarship, as noted above, is especially useful for evaluating the restagings of exhibitions. While the staging of an exhibition is not intended to be an artistic event as ephemeral as most performance art, exhibitions do have performative qualities. They are not

[414]Marina Abramović is an excellent example of an artist who has carefully crafted her identity through documentation of her performances, as illustrated in a 2012 documentary on her work: *The artist is present*, directed by Jeff Dupre and Matthew Akers (United States: Music Box Films, 2012), DVD. Amelia Jones's article "'The Artist Is Present' Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence" offers a critique of Abramović's work and examines her inability to use archival documentation to faithfully reenact past performances. (*The Drama Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 16-45.

[415] Rebecca Schneider, "Archives: Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 6 (2001), 102.

meant to be permanent and the curators, artists, and viewers are all performers in the exhibition. In an interview conducted for "When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969 Venice 2013," Celant likened his project to performance artist Marina Abramović's recent series of performance reenactments.[416] To broaden the context for Celant's curatorial decisions, it is relevant to briefly examine one of the most debated performance reenactments, Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*, held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2007.

In the early years of performance art Abramović and other artists chose to limit the documentation of their work. In their view the artistic creation was the performance, and not the residual traces of it. Peggy Phelan, a founding scholar of performance art, supported this interpretation and argued: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."[417] However, in the twenty-first century, Abramović felt differently about the ephemeral nature of performance art and concluded it was necessary to consider new ways to repeat and preserve these actions. Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* was her attempt to offer a model for performance reenactment "that respects the past and also leaves space for interpretation."[418] Abramović argued that the poor quality of performance documentation does not provide those interested in examining and understanding these works with a true sense of the original: "Due to the dire conditions of performance art documentation, these substitutable media never did justice to the actual

[416] Verhagen, 39.
[417] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.
[418] Marina Abramović, *Seven Easy Pieces* (Milan: Charta, 2007), 10.

performance. The only real way to document a performance art piece is to re-perform the piece itself."[419]

Seven Easy Pieces consisted of seven performances, six of which were recreated works by other artists and the seventh, *Entering the Other Side* [fig. 50], was a new creation by Abramović for the exhibition. The six reenactments by Abramović included: Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974) [fig. 51], Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972) [fig. 52], VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969) [fig. 53], Gina Pane's *The Conditioning*, the first action of *Self-Portrait(s)* (1973) [fig. 54], Joseph Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1964) [fig. 55], and Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (1975) [fig. 56]. To recreate these works for the Guggenheim Museum Abramović consulted photographic, video and written documentation of the original works and created for each a performance score. Over the course of a week Abramović performed one score each day, each lasting seven hours. To enact these scores Abramović performed visual elements derived from the original archive material. Her intention with these scores was to preserve the original works in a form that could then be reproduced by later performers.

Abramović's scores were controversial. In "Enduring Documents: Re-Documentation in Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces,"* however, performance historian Lara Shalson chose to interpret Abramović's use of documentation in an affirmative manner and as a means to legitimize reenactment and assert its necessity. Instead of seeing photographic documentation as a reification of ephemeral form, she argues, these documents can be used to inspire new performative acts that invite new interpretations:

[419] Abramović, 11.

> By performing the photographs, Abramović reversed what is usually presumed to be the temporal relationship between performance and photography (where photographs follow performance)…. By taking on the poses in the photographs, Abramović performed this living stillness. In doing so for an extended period of time, her performance also reactivated the temporality of photography itself.[420]

Shalson, who attended the entirety of *Seven Easy Pieces*, found that Abramović's "performing the photographs" offered her new understandings of the earlier performances she thought she had already known so well through their documentation. While watching Abramović perform Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* over a seven-hour period, for example, she witnessed the dead, frozen hare become more intimately animate with the artist:

> When I look at the photo of Beuys now, I understand something about the relationship between his (then) living body and the hare's (already) dead body that I did not before. I understand how a living body might transform that which is still through an extended embodied engagement with it. I understand this because I was there at the Guggenheim thirty years after Beuys' performance when Abramović performed his actions and posed in the postures held by him in the images captured by the camera all those years before. For me, rather than supplanting the photograph or exposing its inadequacy, Abramović's performance served to *extend* the image. In this way, *Seven Easy Pieces* affirmed that our relationships to documents are contingent and changing too. Rather than imagining that that which 'remains' is stable and unchanging; rather than imagining that if it remains, we 'have' it; what *Seven Easy Pieces* demonstrated is that all understanding occurs through embodied acts of attendance, which occur in time and must be repeated.[421]

Shalson's reasoning has parallels in the recent work by performance art historian Rebecca Schneider, who has argued for a reconsideration of performance art defined as a process of disappearance that leaves no material remains: "…in privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?"[422] Schneider argues that documentation of performance should be viewed not as evidence of something that has passed, but as something still active. She proposes modes

[420] Lara Shalson, "Enduring Documents: Re-Documentation in Marina Abramović Seven Easy Pieces," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23 (2013): 437-438.
[421] Shalson, 440.
[422] Schneider, "Archives: Performance Remains," 101.

of accessing history other than through archival documents such oral accounts, body-to-body transmissions, and reenactments.[423] These modes of perpetuating cultural memory have existed for thousands of years, but have been depreciated by a modern Western society that has traditionally favored written accounts.[424] Instead of viewing a performance as existing only once during a limited time frame, one can broaden its parameters to include activities after the event such as the conversations, reflections, reinterpretations, research, and interactions with residual objects and documents.[425]

What can be drawn from both Shalson and Schneider's arguments for reconsidering how scholars view the relationship between performance art and archival materials is that these materials are not records of an authentic original that once existed, but are in fact information within a mutable living history. Although performance reenactment runs tangentially to exhibition reenactment, Shalson and Schneider's proposals can support the relevancy and legitimacy in restaging an exhibition and suggest an expanded understanding of documentation and "fidelity." Instead of dismissing exhibition reenactments for their inevitable departures from the original, these restagings can be understood as part of a dynamic dialogue with the past. A reenactment of the past can offer viewers' new insights into the original work, suggest new directions of artistic investigation, and invite participants to connect with history through direct involvement.

Like Schneider and Shalson, Reesa Greenberg also views reenactment as a tool to enable participants to experience the past in a tangible manner.[426] For example, she describes Stephanie

[423] Schneider, 102.
[424]Schneider.
[425] Paul Clarke and Julian Warren, "Ephemera: Between Archival Objects and Events," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 30 (2009): 50.
[426] Greenberg.

Barron's exhibition reenactments as "*lieux de mémoire*' [sites of memory], tangible touchstones through which memory can be activated, recovered, and re-integrated into a collective memory of exhibitions."[427] Greenberg asserts that a new mode of accessing history and generating a collective memory can be accomplished through the World Wide Web, which offers not only the ability to archive documents in a traditional manner, but also interweave into these archives oral accounts, audio and video recordings, and a diversity of other source material culled from a broad field. Greenberg considers it necessary for curators and museums to adopt the latest resources, such as using the Web as a meta-archive. Already the Web has become an unofficial archive for many exhibitions, as many museum goers film and photographically document their visits in detail.[428] These documents become part of the exhibition's history and a larger cultural memory and, according to Greenberg,

> [t]he pressure of so much individual remembering has pushed institutions to adopt and adapt to the newest forms of online remembering…. The facility with which images and videos can migrate from site to site, their inclusion in general web searches, and their downloadabilty increase the likelihood they will be seen – and remembered. And the more exhibitions rather than art works in exhibitions are seen, the more possible a wider and fuller understanding of exhibition histories becomes.[429]

Greenberg further argues that the Web not only offers more information about exhibitions, but its use helps us rethinks the traditional notion of an exhibition being a singular event, since on the Web past and present exhibitions can coexist.[430]

Both of Celant's recent curatorial projects, "Arte Povera 2011" and "When Attitudes Become Form Bern 1969 Venice 2013" engage the issues raised by Schneider, Greenberg and Shalson. These two exhibitions offer examples of a contemporary approach to rethinking the temporality of exhibitions. Both utilize the Web to provide a base of information about

[427] Ibid.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid.
[430] Ibid.

contemporary exhibitions. Though the web design for "Arte Povera 2011" is minimal and lacks in-depth content and complex viewer interaction, the Prada Foundation has produced a slightly more advanced website that offers viewers a more detailed exploration of the exhibitions with press releases, videos, project descriptions, and numerous color images. In an interview about "When Attitudes Become Form," Celant reiterates his motivation for creating reenactments: "Today we understand that re-creating a situation and a relationship between objects of art is a way of communicating a history that, while it has shaped the developments of the last fifty years, has been lost at the level of experience."[431] Celant believes that history has a tendency to forget productions such as ephemeral artistic environments, when they lack commercial value.[432] An examination of "When Attitudes Become Form" and the Prada Foundation's reenactment of this exhibition illustrates Celant's conceptions of the manner in which these ephemeral events can be re-experienced and remembered.

Today many critics and art historians hail Szeemann's 1969 "When Attitudes Becomes Form" as a revolutionary show that set the stage for contemporary exhibition practices. The new exhibition format presented unconventional and unorthodox materials and objects in an intimate, communal space that created a dialogue between the works and among the artists. This type of exhibition also created a space with an engaging environment in which viewers could be active participants within the exhibition space. The exhibition had a spontaneous, instantaneous quality, with works of art shifting and settling in the raw, open space that made viewers feel as though they were embedded in the present moment. One visitor, Franz Meyer, recalled years later the impression of the exhibition upon him: "The Attitudes exhibition, unlike the contextual thematic

[431] Celant, "Why and How," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 395.
[432] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 19, 2013.

group shows before, overwhelmed me. It was an event with a palpable inner necessity, an uncertainty maybe that was felt beneath the skin, but one that was also immensely pleasurable and inspiring."[433]

The original show displayed 127 works created by 69 artists working in America and Western Europe. The exhibition, housed within the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, consisted of four galleries spaces on the main floor and two galleries in the basement. Upon entering the main foyer viewers encountered a space dominated by the work of American artist Richard Serra. Along the back wall hung Serra's *Belts* (1966-67) with *Splash* (1969) along the floor [fig. 57]. These works were flanked on adjacent walls by three of Serra's "Prop Pieces." Within this space Gilberto Zorio performed *Trasciniamo un po' di* (*Let's drag a little of…*) that involved dragging cloth filled with wet ashes and bay leaves across the floor with two Plexiglas tubes [fig. 58]. Within the southeastern hallways of the main floor were works by Joseph Beuys, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Richard Artschwager, Barry Flanagan, Richard Long, Bruce Nauman, Mario Merz, Alighiero Boetti, and Edward Kienholz. Uniting these two galleries was Barry Flanagan's *Two Space Rope Sculpture* (1967), a thick rope 59 feet long that twisted in a serpentine manner along the floor and between the artworks [fig. 59]. Although the exhibition combined artists from different nationalities into similar spaces, the largest gallery was filled with work produced primarily by American artists such as Walter de Maria, Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Richard Tuttle, Alan Saret, and Keith Sonnier.[434] The flanking gallery on the northwestern side of the museum displayed the work of Carl Andre, Robert Ryman, Fred Sandback, Mel Bochner, Sol LeWitt and Franz Erhard Walther (who also performed a work within this space). In the stairwell

[433] Christian Rattemeyer, "Drama and Dynamism: How an Exhibition Came Into Being," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 480.
[434] Others in this space included Rolf Ricke, Francoise Lambert, Gary B. Kuehn, Markus Raetz, Richard Artschwager, and Reiner Ruthenbeck.

between the main and basement floors was an untitled installation by Jannis Kounellis, jute sacks filled with corn, coal, potatoes, and peas [fig. 60], and Lawrence Weiner's *36' x 36' Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall* (1968) [fig. 61], which consisted of removing a square portion of the gallery wall to reveal the surface beneath.[435] Running through this space as well as other galleries was Alain Jacquet's *Les fils électriques* (1968), a series of electrical wires creeping across walls, around columns and hanging from ceilings [fig. 62]. The downstairs galleries were occupied primarily by work created by Arte Povera artists.[436]

Instead of conventionally placing these works on pedestals or hanging them upon the gallery walls, the objects were irregularly spread out and mingled together across the gallery spaces. Unique for an exhibition at the time, Szeemann invited the artists to install their own work and had only a vague idea of the type of art that each artist would present.[437] Materials were unconventional; they ranged from fire and ice to felt and margarine. There were no barriers or security measures in place to distance the viewer from the artworks. Viewers could immerse themselves within the thickness of multiple works precariously placed against the museum's wall, along its floors, burning from the ceiling as in the instance of Zorio's *Torce* (1969) [fig. 63] composed of four burning torches attached to reeds stretched across the ceiling between two walls, or oozing within the corners, as with Beuys' *Fat Corner* made of margarine placed along the floorboard and the corner of a gallery [fig. 64]. Many of the artworks were altered through viewers' interaction. For example Boetti's *Io che prendo il sole a Torino il 19 gennaio 1969* [*Me Sunbathing in Turin, January 19, 1969*] (1969) [fig. 65], a self-portrait of the artist created from

[435] Robert Smithson's *Bern Earth – Mirror Displacement* (1969) and Walter De Maria's *The Land Show* (1969) were also in this stairway.
[436] Artists shown in this space included Gilberto Zorio, Alighiero Boetti, Mario Merz, Giovanni Anselmo, and the American artist Neil Jenney.
[437] Hoffmann, 494.

balls of clay placed in a crude rendering of the human form, was located on the floor of the gallery and was kicked and shifted as viewers moved through the space. Looking at multiple photographs of the work clearly shows the unpredictable shift over time.

In the spirit of the show, contributing artists took their artistic research and social commentary beyond the Kunsthalle into the surrounding environment. In a critique of the museum establishment Michael Heizer produced *Depression*, a series of craters punched into the pavement outside the museum by a wrecking ball [fig. 66]. Jan Dibbets' dug out the four corners of the museum in *Museum-socle with Angles of 90** [fig. 67] and Ger van Elk removed a square meter of concrete from the main entrance of the Kunsthalle and replaced it with an exact photograph of the original concrete in *Replacement Piece* [fig. 68]. Within the city of Bern, Daniel Buren, who was not officially part of the exhibition, placed his striped posters throughout the city for his work *Affichages sauvages* [fig. 69]. For *Graffiti Stamp: Lips of Artist* (1968), Stephen Kaltenbach stamped a design of his lips across the cities surfaces. Standing on the roof of the Kunsthalle, Robert Barry released a radioisotope into the sky, which would continue to expand outward invisibly into the atmosphere [fig. 70].[438] Richard Long walked from March 18th to the 22nd, 1969 in the Bernese Highlands and documented the event in the Kunsthalle by placing a banner on a gallery wall with his name and the dates of the walk [fig. 71]. In Schulwarte, an abandoned school across from the Kunsthalle, was housed a satellite exhibition that showed the work of Robert Morris, Pier Paolo Calzolari, William T. Wiley, Allen Ruppersberg and Hans Haacke, among others.

The idea to recreate "When Attitudes Becomes Form" in 2013 emerged out of a dialogue which had its origins in a conversation begun in 2010, and included Germano Celant, Miuccia

[438] Anne Rorimer, "Conventions of Display," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 489.

Prada, the German artist Thomas Demand and the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. This conversation first led to the 2012 exhibition "The Small Utopia. Ars Multiplicata" also held at Ca' Corner della Regina in Venice and curated by Celant. "The Small Utopia" examined art works and installations created between 1900 and 1975 that were reproduced by artists in multiples. The title of the show referenced the historic-avant-garde artists' utopic vision of the power of art to transform society. This show contained over 600 works and a diversity of artistic media, from painting and sculpture to magazines, film, fashion and radio, utilized during the twentieth century in these artists' attempts to distribute and extend their work into the larger world.[439] Through the use of replication and repetition these artists critiqued the preciousness of "unique originals" and romantic conceptions of artistic labor.[440] Among the collection (ironically) displayed in enormous glass vitrines throughout the palazzo were iconic works such as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) [fig. 72], Joseph Beuys' *Felt Suit* (1970) [fig. 73], Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (1961) [fig. 74], Andy Warhol's *Heinz Tomato Ketchup Box* (1964) [fig. 75], Fluxus kits from the 1960s and other works by Futurist, Dada, Bauhaus, Surrealist and Constructivist artists.

While "The Small Utopia" focused primarily on the reproduction of artistic objects created in the twentieth century, some attention was given to the reconstruction of architectural environments. Celant recreated Piet Mondrian's *Salon of Madame B. in Dresden* (1926) [fig. 76], Theo van Doesburg's *Café Aubette* (1926-28) [fig. 40] and El Lissitzky's *Abstrakte Kabinett* (1928) [fig. 77] for the 1976 Venice Biennale, and these reconstructions, among others, reappeared again for this twenty-first-century exhibition, raising the issue of recreating *in situ*

[439] In addition to drawing together a vast collection of work, the Prada Foundation also staged a series of Fluxus events to be performed over a one week period.
[440] Germano Celant, *The small utopia: ars multiplicata* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2012), 15-17.

works in which the original site was a vital element of the artistic creation. Out of this installation arose the Prada Foundation's interest in the recreation of exhibitions in their entirety.[441]

An objective of restaging "When Attitudes Become Form" was to broaden the restaging of artistic environments to include entire exhibitions. Szeemann's exhibition was remarkable for being one of the first to rethink how a group exhibition could be presented. A restaging of the dynamic spatial dialogue that occurred among all the artists' works could provide new viewers a chance to experience and be inspired by the energy generated within this collective endeavor as well as offer those who originally viewed the show a chance to revisit the dynamic works of the past. The restaging was not meant to be understood or experienced as an exact replica of the past. According to Miuccia Prada, the most important rationale for this project was to "recreate the emotion and passion" inspired by the original installation that was tied to the socio-critical art produced by these artists.[442]

More than a tribute to Szeemann and the innovations of this exhibition's enterprise, this restaging functioned as a project with a larger scope for Celant. Just as Celant's return to Arte Povera in the 1980s was driven by his desire to respond to trends within the art market that glorified the consumption of artistic products, for Celant the return to Szeemann's "When Attitudes Become Form" was a reminder to the current art world of the potential of art to respond to and resist commoditization. [443] This restaging provided the chance to introduce new viewers to the attitudes, energy and ideas of artists' actively engaging socio-cultural issues of the

[441] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.
[442] Miuccia Prada, "Preface," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), np.
[443] Celant, "A Readymade," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 390-91.

1960s, among them, identity, nationalism, and the structure of the art world. Though Celant believes that the radical spirit captured in Szeemann's 1969 exhibition no longer exists and that art is no longer used effectively as a political tool in real struggles, [444] in the case of "When Attitudes Become Form" many of the artists exhibited in this show are still alive and their attitudes still persists. Their conversation with the world around them is still active and engaged.[445] The value of this restaging also lay in its ability to encourage a conversation about the direction in which artistic and museological practices can be carried out into the future. For Celant, the freedom promoted within Szeemann's exhibition, from the viewer's immersion within the environment to the intimately shared space of the artistic works, still stands in stark contrast to current practices within museums that carefully guard, regulate and organize their exhibition spaces. [446]

For this restaging Celant and his team consulted documents, letters and photographs of the exhibition.[447] Szeemann carefully documented his exhibition process in the numerous shows he curated during his career. These resources were abundant and were a crucial factor in allowing for such a grand undertaking to occur. The number of superb photographic documents relating to this exhibition was rare for its time: Szeemann was savvy in his promotion of the show and hired the New York photographer Harry Shunk, who was well regarded for his documentation of avant-garde, contemporary exhibitions. Other photographers who documented this show included Claudio Abate, Leonardo Bezzola, Balthasar Burkahard, Siegfried Kuhn,

[444] In an interview with Rem Koolhaas that was published in the *When Attitudes Become Form, Bern 1969/Venice 2013* catalogue, Celant stated: "Art has allowed itself to be dragged along by the market and has arrived at an extreme of ineffectiveness in its critical and poetic relationship with society and culture" (Celant, "Why and How," 411).
[445] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 19, 2013.
[446] Celant, "Why and How," 412.
[447] Szeemann's archive is currently housed at The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

Dölf Preisig, and Albert Winkler.[448] These photographs, which numbered in the thousands, were pivotal in helping Celant and his team recreate the original exhibition.[449] In fact many times these photographs revealed forgotten works that had not been documented in the catalogue. [450] Szeemann was also pioneering in the advertisement of the exhibition by having the installation of the show filmed by Marlene Belilos, a reporter for a French-language television channel,[451] and publishing his personal diary in the exhibition catalogue.[452]

In his essay, "A Readymade," written for the *When Attitudes Become Form* catalogue, Celant argues that the original exhibition was exemplary in rethinking the function of the exhibition space. Instead of focusing on artistic style, Szeemann united artists based on their use of materials and techniques and the underlying philosophy that "everything is art." Based on this expanded notion that recognizes the temporal space and environment in which art objects are shown as part of the artistic work, Celant conceived the restaging of "When Attitudes Become Form" as an historical readymade in which the exhibition becomes an artistic entity unto itself.[453] By treating the entire exhibition as a readymade artifact, Celant and his team transferred the original into a new context within the Ca' Corner della Regina, and invited a new interpretation of the 1969 event.

The team at first struggled with how to re-exhibit the original show. They rejected a restaging within a neutral white space that stripped all context from the original environment and decided instead to simply house the works within the existing setting of the historic palazzo. To

[448] Rattemeyer, 480.
[449] Celant, "Germano Celant/Thomas Demand," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 399.
[450] Celant, "Why and How," 403.
[451] Rattemeyer, 480.
[452] Charles Esche, "A Different Setting Changes Everything," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 473.
[453] Celant, "A Readymade," 390.

activate the restaging and to capture the air of the present moment, Celant and his team sought to bring the past exhibition into the present by intermingling the temporal and physical spaces, inserting, in effect, the entire physical exhibition space of the Kunsthalle in Bern into Ca' Corner della Regina. This grafting allowed for visible cracks between the structure of the baroque palazzo and the replica of the original exhibition space and enhanced the spatial and temporal break between the original and the copy [figs. 78 and 79]. In order to avoid forcing a literal replication of the original environment, some of the palazzo's baroque walls remained exposed and provided backdrops for the artworks [figs. 80 and 81] and the entire ceiling of the palazzo remained visible [fig. 82]. This nesting of architecture within architecture allowed viewers to have momentary glimpses into a far distant time, but a turn of the head betrayed the contemporary support within which the exhibition was housed.

An objective of the 2013 restaging was to recreate as closely as possible the original exhibition space without allowing the restaging to produce a hollow facsimile of the earlier show. A nostalgic experience was not the team's intention.[454] Nor was the goal, as with so many other restagings within the last few decades, to adopt elements of the original exhibitions and place them alongside entirely new works that reflected the original show's influence. Similarly, Celant and his team sought to avoid creating a spectacular event that transformed the once-radical affair into a spectacle that served the demands of the art market for consumable entertainment. Whereas the original show captured the raw flux of artistic interventions, a restaging was at risk of offering only reified art objects displayed in a static manner. The subtle

[454] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.

temporal and spatial rift provided by the Prada staging, however, mitigated against this effect and invited new conversations and interpretations.[455]

Over the course of the project's development Koolhaas found it ironic at first that Celant and Demand wanted to faithfully replicate the original show that was known for its creative freedom and transformative energy. Koolhaus concluded that the final outcome of interlacing the two environments, however, was successful in creating an "experimental dimension."[456] It was decided to reconstruct the entirety of "When Attitude Becomes Form" on a one-to-one scale, from the floors to the white walls and everything in between, including non-functioning radiators, moldings, doors, and doorframes, faux parquet floors, free-standing window frames where the originals would have been located in the original space.[457] Celant and his team located artworks that still existed and commissioned artists to recreate lost works,[458] resituating each artwork in the same relative position it would have occupied in the Kunsthalle as well as considering how each of the artist's interventions in the environment interacted with other artistic interventions.[459]

With regard to the replication of missing works, Koolhaas and Prada suggested having them re-fabricated, which would create more physical volume within the exhibition space. This suggestion was flatly refused by Celant and Demand.[460] Celant felt that re-fabrication would offer only a simulacral experience and though the experience might provide a superficial

[455] Celant, "A Readymade," 390-91.
[456] Rem Koolhaas, "Germano Celant/Rem Koolhaas," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 414.
[457]Marcia E. Vetrocq, "RE: Re-," *The Brooklyn Rail*, July 15, 2013, http://2000www.brooklynrail.org/2013/07/editorsmessage/re8202re, accessed January 30, 2014.
[458] Holland Cotter, "Art's Future Meets Its Past." *The New York Times*, August 14, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/arts/design/prada-foundation-remounts-a-1969-exhibition.html?_r=0, accessed January 30, 2014.
[459] Celant, 393.
[460] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 19, 2013.

knowledge of the original, it would not provide the same vitality.[461] Because many of the works originally shown in the exhibition were ephemeral objects or had been destroyed at the end of the show, to restage these works, Celant and his team dealt with this history in a variety of ways. For example, Neil Jenney's *The Curtis Mayfield Piece* was not reconstructed because the artist felt it would be contrary to the logic of the original work, which was made from neon elements the artist happened to find on the floor of a fluorescent light shop [fig. 83]. To remake a work that originally cost very little would now cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.[462] In another instance a creation by Beuys, *Wärmeplastik* [*Hot Plastic*] (1969), could not be obtained because it belonged in a private collection [fig. 84]. In situations such as these, where it was impossible to display either an original or new replica made by the artist, the solution was to demarcate the original place of a work with a silhouette outline [fig. 85]. In other cases, copies were requested from artists' foundations and estates. Only on a few occasions did the artist oppose a reconstruction of a work, and in these cases the artist suggested displaying a fragment of the original or substituting it for a different work.[463] Furthermore, it was difficult to capture the original performative actions of some of the artists such as Zorio's *Let's drag a little…* or Kasper König and Anny de Decker wearing the work of James Lee Byars, *Two in a Hat (Fictions Doctor Degrees),* which consisted of a single length of fabric with its ends wrapped around the two artists' heads [fig. 86].[464] In the case of Zorio, the artist chose to reenact his performance.

Artists who had created dangerous works that involved fire, high-voltage electricity or that were installed in precarious positions were not reinstalled in their original manner, or were not installed at all, such as Hidetoshi Nagasawa *Dry Ice* (1969) [fig. 87], a block of dry ice

[461] Celant, "Why and How," 418.
[462] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.
[463] Verhagen, 40.
[464] Celant, "Why and How," 406

placed on the gallery floor, Bruce Nauman's *Collection of Various Flexible Materials Separated by Layers of Grease with Holes the Size of My Waist and Wrists* (1966) [fig. 88], and Panamarenko's *Bottekes met sneeuw* [*Boots with Snow*] (1966) [fig. 89]. Also, through their archival research, Celant and his team realized not only that there were forgotten, undocumented works, but also that not all the art originally intended to be shown in the 1969 exhibition was actually shown. For example, works by Emilio Prini, Jannis Kounellis, Pier Paolo Calzolari and Pino Pascali were stopped in customs by red tape.[465] It was decided to include those works in the restaging as well as those that had been proposed for the exhibit, but were not carried out, such as a performance by Paolo Icaro.

The reception of "When Attitudes Became Form, Bern 1969 Venice 2013" was mixed. Adrian Searle, an art critic for *The Guardian*, found the show informative in demonstrating the dynamics of the original show and the feeling of camaraderie among the artists that must have existed. In a similar positive vein, he described the juxtaposed environments as capturing a "strange yet magical dislocation."[466] In contrast, Marcia Vertocq's review of the show for *The Brooklyn Rail* argued that the artificial environment constructed by Celant and his team offered only simulacra: "By hijacking the viewer's imagination, the re-staging renders the exhibition inert: *all* the works seem to be replicas, even though most are not."[467] Furthermore Vertocq was critical of the juxtaposed spaces that abruptly shifted from the replicated Kunsthalle to the Ca'

[465] Celant, 407.
[466] Adrian Searle, "From Prada to Povera: the Venice Biennale recaptures the spirit of the 60s," *The Guardian*, May 31, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/may/31/prada-venice-biennale-2013, accessed March 30, 2014.
[467] Vetrocq.

Corner's baroque features, considering the staging to be blatant exhibitionism that failed to truly bring the original exhibition into the present space.[468]

New York Times critic Holland Cotter found the grafting of old and new stimulating: "It turns replication into a form of rethinking about art past and present, and about how myths are made."[469] Cotter favored the restaging of "When Attitudes Become Form" because the show offered viewers a chance to be reminded of the spirit of the original and the changes that have occurred within the art market since 1969. Cotter also noted key elements of the original exhibition that have been overlooked in the mythologizing of the show. For example, while the show is celebrated for its expression of artistic freedom, Szeemann had in fact carefully planned and organized the event. Furthermore, though the show was considered politically radical, the artists' works did not directly address political issues, nor did the inclusion of primarily only American and Western European males[470] help to breakdown gender and race barriers. While the show has become known as a countercultural event that defied the art system, Cotter also notes that documents displayed by the Prada Foundation revealed that the project was funded by a corporation.[471] The scale and international prerogative of "When Attitudes Become Form" was facilitated by the financial support of Philip Morris, one of the first instances of financial backing for exhibitions from this private corporation. Philip Morris funded the travels of artists from abroad as well as providing unlimited cigarettes during the installation of the art and the opening night of the show.[472]

[468] Ibid.
[469] Cotter.
[470] The three women included were Eva Hesse, Jo Ann Kaplan and Hanne Darboven.
[471] Cotter.
[472] Hoffman, 494.

In her essay, "Reconstruction Era: The Anachronic Time(s) of Installation Art," art historian Claire Bishop emphasizes the importance of inviting artists to take the lead in reconstructions of their work in order to "ensure that the result is never solely an empty replica, a dutiful but inadequate imitation of the past. When artists undertake the work of reconstruction sensitively, two authorships and two temporalities can co-exist in one anachronistic object: an archival representation of the past, and a voice that speaks to the concerns of today."[473] Celant's curatorial practice over the years has often followed this approach to authorship. Working with diverse teams of collaborators that include designers, writers, architects and artists, Celant invites an array of individuals with various genres of expertise to develop and envision an exhibition.[474] In the case of the 2013 restaging of "When Attitudes Become Form," Celant worked closely with Demand, Koolhaas and Prada to create an anachronistic readymade. Similarly, for Celant's return to Arte Povera in a series of exhibitions in 2011, he worked closely with the artists to reconceptualize works that had been produced over a fifty-year span.

To present "Arte Povera 2011" neither the model of reenactment developed for "When Attitudes Become Form" nor the approach utilized by Abramović met the challenge of re-presenting works embedded with inherent mutability. To recreate an historic readymade in the case of "When Attitudes Become Form," it was necessary for Celant and his team to remain as close as possible to the original exhibition setting in order to capture the past dialogue between the objects and the environment. Similarly, Abramović's reenactments attempt to create a strong dialogue between past and present, yet her decision to create performance scores of these reenactments restricts the way future endeavors will be carried out. An approach to artistic

[473] Claire Bishop, "Reconstruction Era: The Anachronic Time(s) of Installation Art," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013), 436.
[474] Verhagen, 41.

recreation that resonates more consistently with the fluid, contingent work of Arte Povera artists was outlined by the American artist Allan Kaprow.

Kaprow is best known for his Happenings and Environments, directly involving participants in large and small-scale artistic events that explored the participants' experience of art in life. The question of reenacting his work of the 1960s and 1970s arose decades later for exhibitions such as "Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958-1964" at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, curated by Barbara Haskell in 1984, and "Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979" held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1998, curated by Paul Schimmel and Kristine Stiles. To address the issue of recreating work that was intended to exist only once, Kaprow developed the concept of "reinvention," as opposed to reenactment. Instead of a retrospective showing of documents and relics of the past or attempting to simulate the original activities, Kaprow proposed to create anew (verses recreate) the works of the past, allowing new participants a chance to interpret and invent new versions of the original works. Kaprow's decision to allow his works to be reinvented arose from his concern over the direction his work would take in the future. For him, the term "reenactment" implied that recreations were replicas and closely tied to the historicity of the original.[475] "Reinvention" recognized that a Happening or Environment could only occur once and never be repeated, but still allowed for new participants to experience Kaprow's work in a new form.[476] For his text *7 Environments*, Kaprow elucidated the difference between reinvention and reenactment:

> I say reinventions, rather than reconstructions, because the works … differ markedly from their originals. Intentionally so. As I wrote in notes to one of them, they were

[475] Stephanie Rosenthal, "Agency for Action," in *Allan Kaprow: Art as Life* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 62.
[476] Rosenthal, 63.

> planned to change each time they were remade. This decision, made in the late 50s, was the polar opposite of the traditional belief that the physical art object—the painting, photo, music composition, etc.—should be fixed in a permanent form.
>
> Furthermore, the Environment quickly incorporated the idea of internal changes during its presentation. The conventional spectators became the participants who executed the changes. Here, also, the traditional notion of the uniquely talented artist (the genius) was suspended in favor of a tentative collectivity (the social group as artist). Art was like the weather.[477]

Kaprow further outlined his "reinventions" requirements for the inclusion of his *18 Happenings* (1959) in the "Out of Actions" exhibition. He requested that the new version of the work be clearly different than the preceding versions: though based on the past, the reinvention needed to occur outside of the museum in the daily environment and was meant for participants and not for audiences. Kaprow would conduct a workshop on Happenings for the participants; the museum could exhibit documentation only on the new version and Kaprow would give a lecture for a general audience on Happenings and the newest version of *18 Happenings*.[478] Kaprow further stipulated that the reinvented version of a Happening or Environment should be carried out under the responsibility of a single leader who would follow loose guidelines or scores established by Kaprow as a reference point to the original. (Kaprow's open-ended scores are distinct from Abramović's in that Abramović expects the re-enactor to be "properly trained" and indicates that there are correct and incorrect ways for the reenactment to be carried out.[479]) According to the art historian Stephanie Rosenthal, in choosing reinvention over reenactment, Kaprow was acknowledging and accepting his own mortality and that his works would lead lives of their own.[480] This appreciation for mutability and the inevitable transformation of artistic materials resonates with the attitudes of Arte Povera artists, whose works also change like the weather.

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[477] Allan Kaprow, *7 Environments* (Napoli: Studio Morra, 1992), 23.
[478] Rosenthal, 62.
[479] Abramović, 9.
[480] Ibid., 65.

Celant has acknowledged that a central challenge posed by ephemeral Arte Povera works is their historic fate.[481] The majority of the artists were still alive for the staging of "Arte Povera 2011" and able to participate in the installation of their works in the new environments. In the future, placement of these works within new situations will fall to curators or other artists who must interpret how the works might engage in a dialogue with new cultural-historic settings, the types of replacement materials to be used, and how these materials will be arranged. It remains for the Arte Povera artists, while they are alive, to leave instructions as to how these installments will be carried out, yet space for creativity and reinterpretation will inevitably remain in the dialogue between the objects and the exhibition spaces. Kaprow's concept of "reinvention" offers a viable solution to how Arte Povera works might be re-exhibited and experienced in the future, a model that could enable the dynamic energy of these artists' works to be maintained as opposed to becoming historic relics.

For the 2011 exhibit, Celant was able to invite the artists to once again reinterpret and reinvent the engagement of their works with the environments. His curation of Arte Povera exhibits over the last fifty years has been criticized by scholars who question the presentation of Arte Povera exhibitions that blur the lines between past and present. In response, Celant stresses the activating agency these artists bring to exhibitions of their work produced over multiple decades. Celant's "Arte Povera 2011" marked this his third major curatorial return to these artists' works as a group. Although "Arte Povera 2011" was not presented as an exact replica of a previous exhibition, Celant's agenda in his continued return to this group of artists can be better understood within the broader context of a curatorial approach that includes his conception

[481] Germano Celant, "A History among Stories," in *Arte Povera History and Stories* (Milan: Electra, 2011), 16-17.

of reinvention. Celant believes that a return to past exhibitions is possible under the rubric of a "re-reading:"

> Once an open and flexible method has been discovered, as in the case of *When Attitudes Become Form* and other exhibitions staged at the same time with the collaboration of the artists themselves, the flow of energy can always be proposed again at different times and in different places. This happened to me recently with 'Arte Povera 2011,' for which I curated and mounted exhibitions – held simultaneously over the course of three months – on the 'Arte Povera' artists in buildings in seven cities around Italy, north and south.[482]

"Arte Povera 2011" coincided with the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification, and while the intention of the event was to showcase the achievements of this group of artists within the larger international art world, emphasis was also placed on these Italian artists' contribution to their national heritage. Just as Celant's curatorial return to Arte Povera in the 1980s was in large part an attempt to address current mega-trends within the art world, his return to Arte Povera in 2011 was also a response to a certain climate as noted in Chapter Three. Celant perceives the twenty-first-century globalized art world, driven by the art market and museums, as focused too heavily on isolated individuals and no longer attending to the larger cultural context and collaborative efforts of artists.[483] While it seems inevitable that the art market will commodify all art forms in some manner, Celant believes that the transgressive and mutable nature of Arte Povera works signals the possibility that artistic creations might slip from the grasp of commodification. Although "Arte Povera" of the late 1960s has become a historicized moment, the energy of the moment has not necessarily been contained in that period. Instead Celant recognizes in his continual return to Arte Povera over the last fifty years the metamorphic quality of an artist's oeuvre that defies abstract, analytical categorizations and which can develop in a variety of directions while maintaining its ties to past artistic research. [484]

[482] Verhagen, 41.
[483] Celant, "A History among Stories," 12.
[484] Celant, 13.

In an interview with Celant by Francesca Cattoi and Antonella Soldaini that was published in Celant's *Arte Povera History and Stories* (2011), the collection of his Arte Povera writings and interviews carried out between 1969 and 2011, Celant explains that although many critics have over the years claimed Arte Povera no longer existed as a movement, he believes that the continued interest and international exhibitions of these artists works, which are often in a state of transformation, continue to offer viewers engaging experiences, confirming the vitality of Arte Povera. The works of these artists, he adds, are "both proof and prophecy." Their challenge over many decades is to "prove their nature of linguistic and cultural foreshadowing."[485] In a second interview with Paola Nicolin also published within the same collection, Celant further explains the value in returning to Arte Povera once again in order to respond to the current condition of the "universe of art:"

> So a 'rereading' of Arte Povera in 2011 may be of use in rediscovering an orientation that is not necessarily always servile and functional to the 'decorative' demands of galleries, museums and collectors. Without turning into a dogma or an ideological issue, this research has moved fluidly in time and space, maintaining its wholeness and always seeking to deal with the totality of doing and existing.[486]

In addition to reasserting the continued relevance of these artists' works, another objective of "Arte Povera 2011" was to bring Italy's museums together in a united project. This endeavor to unite the disparate museums and to develop a stronger collaboration among them was not the first attempt by Celant; he had proposed a similar venture to bring together three leading New York museums when he first took his position at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.[487] Celant's interest in working with a broad and diverse team for "Arte Povera 2011" also

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[485] Celant, 26-27.

[486] Germano Celant, "Other Notes for a Guerilla War," in *Arte povera: history and stories*, (Milan: Mondadori Electra S.p.A., 2011), 280.

[487] This series of exhibitions was important in successfully uniting the diverse Italian museums within a collective project. In 2009 a similar collaborative attempt was made within Italy to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the Futurist movement. Celant describes this project as a failure in that individual agendas by politicians and institutional directors divided the organization and undermined the unifying potential of the project. (Ibid).

resonated in the format of the show's extensive catalogue that documented all of the exhibitions' 300 works and offered a range of essays written by many of the leading Arte Povera scholars, including Claire Gilman, Nicholas Cullinan, Daniel Soutif, Robert Lumley, Gloria Moure, Richard Flood, Thomas McEvilley, Angelo Trimarco and Denys Zacharopoulos. In a similar vein a collaborative dialogue was also struck through the participation of various global institutions with Italian museums and other collections in order to acquire the numerous works that were loaned for this vast undertaking.

To carry out the project's multiple exhibitions staged at various times between September 2011 and April 2012, Celant worked with several curators and only in the instance of the Milan-based exhibition took on sole curatorial duties. These exhibitions were held in seven cities across Italy in eight different museums that in total presented approximately 250 installations created by Arte Povera artists between 1967 and 2011 as well as 50 works produced by various European and American artists who had strong ties to Arte Povera. Two exhibition sites, one in Bologna at the MAMbo (Museo d'Arte Moderna in Bologna) and the other in Naples at the MADRE (Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina) were selected to focus on the historical connection of the sites with previous Arte Povera exhibitions and to display many of the works originally shown at their earlier landmark exhibitions. The 2011 staging of "Arte Povera 1968" in Bologna referred to the politically focused Galleria de' Foscherari exhibit of 1968 which launched critical debate among Italian critics and artists, and in Naples at the church of Santa Maria Donnaregina the 2011 exhibit "Arte povera + azioni povere 1968" reprised the revolutionary show of the same title previously held in the nearby coastal town of Amalfi.[488]

[488] Gareth Harris, "Arte Povera in abundance," *The art newspaper* 227 (2011): 75. Because of organizational difficulties the show in Naples was cancelled and to compensate for this loss, the projects in the cities in Bari and Bergamo were given more attention.

Of the eight exhibitions in "Arte Povera 2011" only two were supervised by curators other than Celant and these were both held in Rome.[489] One was curated by Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli and Massimo Mininni at the Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna while the other was curated by Anna Mattirolo and Luigia Lonardelli for the MAXXI (Museo Nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo). Both of these shows focused more specifically on the individual artists' body of works, including site-specific installations by Kounellis, Zorio and Penone displayed at the MAXXI and a focused study of Pascali's work at the Galleria nazionale d'arte Moderna. This exhibit also presented a small collection of other well-known works produced by Arte Povera artists such as Kounellis' painting *Z-44* (1960) [fig. 90], Fabro's *Buco* (1963 – 66) [fig. 91] and Zorio's untitled work from 1967 made of an *eternit* column balanced on top of a slowly deflating rubber tube [fig. 92].

The exhibitions held at the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Rivoli in Turin and Milan's Triennale showcased Arte Povera on a larger contextual scale, offering broad overviews of the artists' works as well as illustrating their relationships to the larger international art scene. Among the Arte Povera works exhibited were Penone's *11-Meter Tree* (1969–89) [fig. 93], two spruce beams carved to look like two young sapling that have returned the tree to a state closer to its origins; Pistoletto's *Lampadina* (1962-1966) [fig. 94] from his mirror painting series, and Fabro's *Paolo Uccello 1450-1989* (1989) [fig. 95], a metal cube suspended on a steel cable

[489]"Arte Povera 1968" held at MAMbo – Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Bologna from September 24 to December 26, 2011 was curated by Germano Celant and Gianfranco Maraniello; "Omaggio all'Arte Povera" held at MAXXI – Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome from October 6, 2011 to January 8, 2012 was curated by Anna Mattirolo and Luigia Lonardelli; "Arte Povera International" held at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli from October 9, 2011 to February 19, 2012 was curated by Germano Celant and Beatrice Merz; "Arte Povera 1967-2011" held at Triennale di Milano, Milan from October 25, 2011 to January 29, 2012 was curated by Germano Celant; "Arte Povera in città" held at GAMeC Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo on November 15th, 2011 was curated by Germano Celant and Giacinto Di Pietrantonio; "Arte Povera alla GNAM" held at Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna, Rome from December 21, 2011 to March 4, 2012 was curated by Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli and Massimo Mininni; and "Arte Povera in teatro" held at Teatro Margherita, Bari from December 15, 2011 to March 11, 2012 was curated by Germano Celant and Antonella Soldaini.

over the center of the Castello courtyard with delicate rods balanced between its square frames reminiscent of bird's wings as they teeter in the wind. To situate Arte Povera within an international field, works were also shown by artists such as Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Daniel Buren, Dan Flavin, Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Andy Warhol

While the Castello exhibition drew from its own large permanent collection of Arte Povera works and focused on the early phase of Arte Povera from 1967-1972, the city of Milan had not developed a similar collection and had never offered a retrospection of these artists' works in the past. The Arte Povera exhibition for the Milan Triennale housed in the Palazzo dell'Arte showcased works produced from 1967 to 2011, such as Anselmo's *Verso oltremare* (1984) [fig. 96], Boetti's *Mimetico* (1967) [fig. 97] and Paolini's *Amore e Psiche* [*Cupid and Psyche*] (1981) [fig. 25]. In the city of Bergamo, which, like Milan, did not have close historic ties to Arte Povera, a more contemporary exhibition was presented. In addition to filling the GAMeC (Galleria di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea) space with works such as Fabro's *Pavimento Tautologia* [*Floor Tautology*] (1967) [fig. 98] and Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* (1967) [fig. 99], the city's contemporary art museum staged "Arte Povera in città," in which new and older production was integrated with city's buildings, monuments and gateways.

This utilization of artworks to highlight the architectural environment and lived space of the city was also carried out in the city of Bari at the Teatro Margherita. The site, a hollowed out theater in the midst of renovation after a fire had ravaged the structure, was interwoven with Arte Povera creations that invited a dialogue between the artworks and the architecture. Within the large entrance hall of the structure, with its disintegrated stucco dome and stripped barren walls traced with soot, was placed an untitled work by Kounellis from 2010. The composition filled

the main floor with islands of burlap bags filled with coal [fig. 100]. Rising out of each mass were Kounellis' emblematic steel canvases, placed on their corners and pointing upward. Lengthy steel beams stretching towards the ceiling further emphasized their orientation. Atop each beam was a precariously placed small boulder that looked as though it might either support the collapsing ceiling or topple down upon the viewer.

The reception of "Arte Povera 2011" was mixed, although many of the reviews were more descriptive than analytical. Pablo Larios' review in *Frieze* magazine questioned the exhibition's attempt to return to the past after the passage of time has altered the original events: works no longer exist, attitudes have changed and some works had become historically iconic and no longer conveyed the same sense of ephemerality.[490] In his review for *Art Monthly,* Martin Holman alluded to the many debates about of Arte Povera's lack of a definition and ambiguity as a movement. He also pointed out that "Arte Povera 2011" alignment with Italy's 150th anniversary and the location of the artists' works in well-established museums affirmed Arte Povera as an Italian movement and "a national institution."[491] Holman also perceived this latest staging of Arte Povera as a chance to examine Arte Povera's relationship to its local cultural traditions. For Holman the works still retained "astonishing vitality and contemporary relevance…. the installation acknowledges compellingly that simple techniques of combination and adjacency generate both significant experiences in real time and, crucially, the viewer's active interaction and engagement."[492]

The response of the Italian curator and critic for *Frieze* magazine, Francesco Bonami, was almost entirely the opposite. Bonami's launched into his review of "Arte Povera 2011,"

[490] Pablo Larios, "When Attitudes Become Form," *Frieze Magazine* (Sept. 2013), http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/when-attitudes-become-form/, accessed March 20, 2013.
[491] Martin Holman, "Arte Povera 1968," *Art Monthly* 351 (Nov. 2011): 22.
[492] Holman.

"Tristes Artistes," stating that the show failed to convey the original spirit of the movement. Bonami's attack superficially addressed the actual exhibit and instead centered on Celant, who he criticized for "bringing Arte Povera back" in the 1980s as well as 2011. He dismissed Celant's explanations for these returns and claimed that Celant's return to Arte Povera in 1985 was "not the response of guerillas fighting a rampant market, but an understandable (if misguided) attempt by the curator to be part of that very same market, which the Arte Povera artists otherwise risked missing out on."[493] For the 2011 show, Bonami argued that Celant "has become his own worst enemy" for returning to Arte Povera and he faulted Celant for including works produced by the artists after 1971 (when Bonami says Celant was correct in ending the movement), for omitting important key Arte Povera works best representative of their early phase, and because Bonami believed the movement had been diluted through "contrived context and beliefs turned into a rusty ideology," which caused the vitality demonstrated by these artists to lose its "revolutionary force."[494]

Though the questions that Bonami raised with Celant's return to Arte Povera in the 1980s and 2011 are ones that should be asked in order to assess the full implication of these exhibitions, there were larger issues at play Bonami did not address when he criticized Celant for failing to stage the Arte Povera exhibitions in their original cities and to capture the radicalism of the past. At stake for Celant was more than a perpetuation of a "movement" from the late 1960s. "Arte Povera 2011" provided an unprecedented opportunity for Celant to again create an arena for a cross-fertilization of ideas, shared spaces and a breakdown of institutional barriers.[495] Furthermore, the fact that the exhibitions of the 1980s and 2011 enhanced the careers of Celant

[493] Francesco Bonami, "Tristes Artistes," *Frieze Magazine* (January 2012), http://www.frieze.com/issue/print_article/tristes-artistes/, accessed March 20, 2013.
[494] Bonami.
[495] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 19, 2013.

and the Arte Povera artists does not necessarily devalue these initiatives or diminish their relevance. As Celant observes, Arte Povera works can function both as proof of achievement and prophecy, foreshadowing challenges and debates that continue to engage artistic institutions.

While the promotion of Arte Povera via major art institutions and the quasi-retrospective displays of these works might seem antithetical to the original ephemerality the artists intended to inhabit these works, and although the works may not be shown with their original materials, in their original location, or if the artworks are only partially re-installed due to restrictions on the use of harmful and hazardous materials, these works are still able to perform in their adapted and altered states. In line with Kaprow's concept of "reinvention," the restagings of many past Arte Povera works can be consistent with the artists' original intentions and engage the new environments in unique dialogues, sometimes requiring the use of new materials that are transformed in unforeseen ways. Art critics such as Cotter and Holman attest that for many contemporary viewers, Arte Povera works retain an "astonishing vitality."

Celant's continued interest in recreating the dialogue and energy generated between the artworks and the context of display was a driving factor in the restaging of "When Attitudes Become Form" and "Arte Povera 2011." Reenactments of exhibitions such as Szeemann's "When Attitude Becomes Form" or revisiting Arte Povera in 2011 provide the opportunity to refresh our collective cultural memory, to inspire new directions of thinking, and to both reconnect with and re-envision a Western cultural heritage. Celant's restaging of Szeemann's show was not meant to be a replica. Instead, the restaging was in conversation with the original event across time and space. Generating the same energy and spirit of the original show would have been impossible. What the restaging did produce was an entirely new experience that evoked the spirit of the past in the present and allowed for new dialogues and energies to be

produced. New viewers had direct and immediate encounters in the present moment that carried traces and echoes of the past. Reenactments of exhibitions, as well as installations and performances, can offer new observers and participants a chance to experience the events of the past, albeit in a somewhat altered form, and reconfirm the importance of the intentions and emotions underlying the original event. For those who witnessed the original, the reprise offers a chance to relive and re-examine memories of the past. For viewers in both categories, Celant's reenactments help to keep the dynamic, radical energy of the past alive.

Since setting a precedent with his landmark "Ambiente/arte" in 1976, Celant has remained unwavering in his objectives, even though his peers have persisted in questioning the relevancy of re-creating exhibition environments. With exhibitions such as "Arte Povera 2011" and the 2013 "When Attitudes become Form" Celant has advanced a broader inquiry regarding "fidelity" in the restaging of installations and exhibitions. Celant's critical pursuits align with scholarly interest in the anachronistic nature of art objects and artistic environments, a topic central to discourse on art-making and exhibition practices within the twenty-first century. This burgeoning field of study has encouraged scholars such as Celant, Greenberg, Schneider, Stiles, and Jones to challenge utopian concepts of permanence, artistic originality and authenticity and investigate new, dynamic modes of conceptualizing and documenting our physical and incorporeal relationships to time, history and cultural memory.

CONCLUSION

Germano Celant began his career as an art critic traveling through Italy, meeting with artists who were also just beginning their careers. Inspired by the radical energy of the 1960s Celant helped to revise the role of the art critic as a figure who operated as a fellow traveler, collaborating with the artists he addressed. In his 1969 article "Per una critica acritical" Celant proposed that there was no longer a need for the critic to judge or interpret new art forms being produced at the time:

> [A]rt no longer requires any justification and explanation, but only active sensorial participation…. Like the artist, the critic is less and less inclined to offer a critical explanation, and rather tends to make his work talk just as it is offered, without any other function than that of existing. In this way, criticism becomes an accomplice, lives a parallel and independent life with respect to artistic production, and sets itself up as a means of documenting and gathering data, not to deform art, but to let it speak for itself.[496]

As an acritical critic, Celant recognized the need to identify new modes of artistic expression occurring within Italy and coined the term "Arte Povera," which he utilized to highlight the importance of this particular artistic research and related production in the U.S. and Western Europe. Celant employed the term "Arte Povera" to characterize the restless, wide-ranging and mutable nature of these artists' explorations rather than to serve as the name of a stylistic movement. As demonstrated by Celant's engagement with Arte Povera over the last fifty years, this marker can be recalled and repeated, always echoing and reverberating the past energy and call to action the artists embodied in the 1960s. Though Celant's name will be forever associated with Arte Povera, this study has endeavored to complicate and expand established accounts of Celant's actions and the effects of his creative endeavors upon the larger contemporary art world.

[496] Germano Celant, "Per una critica acritical," *Casabella*, no. 343 (1969): 42. Celant's unique persepective on the role of contemporary art criticism is more fully discussed in Chapter One.

In exploring key chapters of Celant's life and career, this dissertation illustrates not only Celant's unique approach in his diverse curatorial and art historical undertakings, but also the complex context within which influential contemporary art has developed. Chapter One, "Becoming a Guerrilla Warrior, 1961-1967," introduces key figures who helped shape Celant's early career, such as Carla Lonzi, Eugenio Battisti and Gian Enzo Sperone, and also acknowledges the influence of radical political activism occurring globally. Though Celant has briefly mentioned influential moments in his early career in interviews, this chapter provides for the first time a comprehensive discussion of Celant's formative years as a critic. To appreciate Celant's later rhetorical stance, it is essential to acknowledge the important influence the Italian Feminist movement and political activism had upon his outlook. Valuing collaboration, free-thinking and rebellious creativity, Celant chose in this decade to become a proponent of a group of young, cutting-edge Italian artists he designated "Arte Povera."

The grouping of these Italian artists together as Arte Povera, addressed in Chapter Two, "Defining Arte Povera," arose from Celant's desire to recognize the new artistic territory explored by these artists and to locate their work within the larger global context of artistic advancements in Western Europe and the United States. This chapter offers a new account of the shifting definition of Arte Povera and assesses the term's historiography. Celant's creation of this term and his series of essays delineating these artists' diverse artistic pursuits laid the groundwork for his career as an influential critic and curator, while also opening him to censure, most pronounced in the 1980s, when he returned his attention to the Arte Povera group, as examined in Chapter Three, "Arte Povera's Reemergence during the 1980s Return to Painting."

In the U.S. and Western Europe, an art-market boom in traditional modes of painting developed in the 1980s, which, in turn, drew a rallying cry of opposition from those who favored

critical avant-garde practices. After discussing the arguments made on both sides of the return-to-painting polemic, Chapter Three presents a comparative analysis of critic Achille Bonito Oliva's and Celant's positions within this heated dispute that have largely remained unaddressed. Though Bonito Oliva's support of Transavantgarde painters was vehement, in hindsight the Transavantgarde owed a considerable debt to Arte Povera, which undermined the unique status he attributed to the painters. Furthermore, Bonito Oliva's attack on Arte Povera was unsuccessful in its sweeping, generalized condemnation of the artists and was weakened by his inclusion of many of these artists in exhibitions he curated at the same time as he denounced their work. Celant, in turn, was accused of defending Arte Povera in the 1980s as a marketing ploy. What was crucial for him, however, was to advocate for critical art-making practices that questioned established norms, dogmas and institutional behavior, an objective grounded in his experiences of 1960s Italy.

The fiscal pressures that swayed artistic practices during the 1980s also affected artistic institutions, as discussed in Chapter Four, "An Independent Curator: Celant's Exhibition Career, 1988-2008." Continuing the examination of Celant's undertakings during his career, this chapter considers in detail the unexamined role Celant played within two pivotal art world organizations, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Prada Foundation. Though Celant's position within these elite institutions seems counter-intuitive, given his earlier radical, anti-establishment position of the late 1960s, Celant navigated within these powerful institutions by utilizing their resources to promote diverse artistic languages and reinforce the relevancy of critical avant-garde art-making. By engaging his particular "perverse approach" and "baroque vision," Celant produced numerous innovative exhibitions over the last two decades.

Reviewing Celant's wide-ranging curatorial projects, he has made a particularly important contribution to rethinking possible physical and temporal contextual situations in exhibition spaces. Chapter Five, "Reenactment/Reinvention: Curating Anachronic Exhibitions in the Twenty-First Century," analyzes three of Celant's most innovative curatorial ventures: "Ambiente/arte dal futurismo alla body art" (1976), "When Attitudes Become Form, Bern 1969 Venice 2013," and "Arte Povera 2011." This chapter locates these exhibitions for the first time within the larger discourse on reenactment practices occurring in the fields of performance and installation art in addition to enumerating a variety of new methods and approaches to be considered for future projects. Though reenactment of past performances and exhibitions has been a controversial subject, Celant has been a leader in demonstrating the potential value of such undertakings.

Celant's pioneering approach to curation has been one of his most important contributions to the contemporary art world. The role of the curator in the early twenty-first century is unlike that of previous decades or eras. Institutional scholars identify the volatile 1960s as the period that first enabled the curator to transition from a custodian of objects to an independent auteur with numerous responsibilities that extend beyond the exhibition space, including commissioning artworks, facilitating funding and residencies for the artists, and authoring texts that outline their views of the art scene. The curator is now a more influential figure in deciding who becomes recognized in the art world and who will become part of the canon of art history.[497]

[497] Beti Žerovc, "The role of the contemporary art curator: a historical and critical analysis," *MJ - Manifesta Journal,* no. 5 (2008): 138-153. The art historian Beti Žervoc examines the role of the contemporary art curator in this article, which is an abridged version of a forthcoming book on the topic.

In the numerous accounts examining the history, function and influence of the role of the contemporary curator that have emerged in the twenty-first century, little acknowledgement has been given to the role Celant played in this field. If he is mentioned, it is in passing as a figure in the 1960s who helped to initially transform the role of the curator. He is listed alongside critics such as Lucy Lippard, Seth Siegelaub, Rudi Fuchs and Harald Szeemann. Within the range of scholarly studies of this subject, emphasis is often placed on Harald Szeemann's pioneering role. Following his death in 2005, multiple publications appeared chronicling his legacy. In the biography *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, the art critic Hans-Joachim Müller declared Szeemann the inventor of the independent curator's position.[498] Müller's account fails to acknowledge Szeemann's friendship and collaboration with Celant, however. Similarly, contemporary art historian Terry Smith's *Thinking Contemporary Curating* credits Szeemann for his significant contribution to the field. As the pioneers of contemporary curation he lists Harald Szeemann, René Block, Pontus Hultén, and Kynaston McShine, but not Celant. [499] Smith refers to Szeemann as a curator-artist, defining his approach to curation as foregrounding his personal vision in the publicity and presentation of the exhibition.[500] Though Celant approaches curation in a manner similar to Szeemann in his reconceptualization of exhibition space as an active agent within the artistic dialogue, Celant does not claim to be an auteur when curating.[501] Instead he describes himself as an orchestra conductor, a film director, a collaborator and a traveling companion and fully gives credit to his team of assistants who help arrange the large-scale exhibitions.[502]

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[498] Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 6.
[499] Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 115.
[500] Ibid., 145.
[501] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18, 2013.
[502] Erik Verhagen, "Germano Celant, When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013," *artpress*, no. 401 (June 2013): 41.

The praise bestowed on Szeemann is warranted, yet there has been a strong tendency in scholarship to mythologize "When Attitudes Becomes Form" and identify Szeemann as the figure who spearheaded the role of the "independent curator." One art historian who has acknowledged this oversight is Benjamin Buchloh. In his 2013 essay, "The Thresholds of 1969," Buchloh argues that the recognition given to Szeemann's show for its progressive approach to exhibition practices is somewhat aggrandized and fails to recognize the contributions of curators such as artist Mel Bochner and Germano Celant, both of whom had curated equally progressive shows prior to Szeemann's.[503] Buchloh sees Bochner's "Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art" in the School of Visual Arts in New York in 1966 as the first exhibition to explore the developments taking place among minimalism, post-minimalism and conceptual art. Similarly, Celant's 1967 exhibit, "Arte Povera – Im Spazio" at Galleria La Bertesca in Genoa and his later manifesto were among the first to recognize the new artistic research being conducted by artists in Italy. The majority of these artists would later be invited by Szeemann to present at "When Attitudes Become Form." Though smaller in scale than Szeemann's Bern exhibition, Celant's 1969 "Arte povera + azione povera" held in Amalfi predated Szeemann's endeavor in allowing artists to actively participate in the installation of their work. Celant's collaborative relationship with the artists shifted the position of the curator to a more active participant in the artistic dialogue.

Celant's influence as an innovative curator has continued through the last quarter of the twentieth century and to the present day. In the late 1980s, just as Celant became the Senior Curator of Contemporary art at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (maintaining his status as an independent curator), many art institutions began to formally recognize the position of the

[503] Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "The Thresholds of 1969," in *When attitudes become form: Bern 1969, Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013): 498.

contemporary art curator. In 1987 the arts center Le Magasin in Grenoble, France launched l'École du Magasin, the first postgraduate curatorial training program in Europe, and in the United States the Art History/Museum Studies division of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) was renamed Curatorial and Critical Studies also in 1987.[504] The nonprofit organization Independent Curators International was established in 1975. The ICI aids curators in producing independent traveling exhibitions that are rented by established museums and offers training and research opportunities. The ICI's objective is to present "innovative and challenging new art, making it accessible to a wide range of audiences, and creating a unique model to do this: a non-profit institution devoted to enhancing the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art without its own space, a kind of 'museum without walls'."[505] In 2013 the ICI honored Celant with The Agnes Gund Curatorial Award and Miuccia Prada with The Leo Award for their contribution to the world of contemporary art [fig. 101].

Celant's activities within the spheres of curation, art criticism and art history over the last sixty years have been distinguished by a unique vision fostered from the rich humus of his cultural past. Drawing from an array of experiences and relationships with Eugenio Battisti and Carla Lonzi to the Arte Povera group and numerous other contemporary artists and critics, Celant has honed his inimitable set of skills during his long career. They have enabled him to follow his passion and dedicate his efforts to reconceiving the function of the exhibition space to involve "baroque" experience, to rediscover artists, artworks and installations that have been lost

[504] Paul O'Neill, "Introduction," in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 2.
[505] Richards, Judith Olch, "Forward and Acknowledgements," in *Words of Wisdom: Curator's* Vade Mecum *on Contemporary Art* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2001), 7. In 2001 the Independent Curators International published this collection of essays by established contemporary curators on the occasion of their 25th anniversary. Among the sixty-one contributors were: Jean-Christophe Ammann, Francesco Bonami, Dan Cameron, Lynne Cooke, Richard Flood, Mary Jane Jacob, Lucy Lippard, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Irving Sandler, Paul Schimmel, Nancy Spector, and Harald Szeemann. Unfortunately, Germano Celant was not included in this publication.

in history because of their lack of commercial appeal, to promote a diversity of artistic languages, and expand our knowledge of their larger contextual impact.

The influential role Celant has played within the art world is one that should be fully recognized to enrich the narrative of contemporary art within the twenty-first century. Celant has been part of a complex interrelationship of artistic events that have taken place over the last sixty years. He has helped to enable spectacular and groundbreaking artistic practices and to share this production with a larger global community, spreading awareness of these avant-garde, critical practices. To accomplish all of this, Celant chose early on in his career to fully trust in himself, his intuition and his vision. Instead of offering justification for his choices and becoming lost in critical polemics, Celant chose to forge ahead by taking a strong and determined approach to his writings and exhibitions, embracing his personal relationships to artists, allowing his past experiences to reverberate in his future projects, and always being willing to take a risk to support the next form of critical art. [506]

[506] Germano Celant, interview with the author, November 18-19, 2013.

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